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Christianity, is it true?

CHRISTIANITY : IS IT TRUE ?

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CHRISTIANITY IS IT TRUE?

FOUNDATIONS AND FACTS
SIMPLY STATED

BY
FRANK B. SHORT ✓

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TO
MY DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER
THIS LITTLE VOLUME
IS
LOVINGLY AND GRATEFULLY
DEDICATED

Preface

THE greater part of this volume is based upon Addresses given by me a few years ago to a Bible Class of men and lads.

Nothing was then farther from my thoughts than publication, but it seemed to me that, if expanded and published, they might at the present time serve a useful purpose. Naturally I felt great reluctance to add yet another to the vast number of books on Christianity, and it was only after much consideration and consultation that I decided to take this course. To many people the elaborate and learned books upon the subject make little or no appeal, and it is hoped that this volume will in some measure meet their needs. I have endeavoured to place before my readers a simple statement of the main

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facts of religion—a statement which it is hoped may give them reasons for their Faith sufficient to enable them to stand firm against the many hostile and conflicting influences by which they are surrounded, or at least to make them realise that belief in Christ is not to be lightly thrown aside.

It may perhaps be thought that attempt has been made to cover too wide a field, and that subjects have been introduced into volume which may seem to travel somewhat beyond the question asked in its title. I could not help feeling, however, that the answer to the question would be incomplete unless the New Testament were linked up with the position of professing Christians of the present day ; and this could only be satisfactorily accomplished by the inclusion of a brief survey of the history of the Church.

The Addresses were originally delivered in plain, simple, and direct language. That simplicity of statement, as well as their somewhat conversational form, it has been thought desirable to preserve.

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In the compilation of the volume I have drawn extensively upon the works of others : to all of them I tender my deep gratitude. For permission to quote, and make use of, the volumes mentioned below, my thanks are specially due to the Bishop of London (*Reasons for Faith* and *Popular Objections to Christianity*), and to the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, the publishers of those volumes ; to the same Society (*Helps towards Belief in the Christian Faith*, by the Rev. C. G. Griffinhoofe) ; to the National Society (*Our Mother Church of England*, by the late Canon Watson) ; to the Sunday School Union (*A Popular Handbook of Christian Evidences*, by the late Rev. John Kennedy, D.D.) ; to the Rev. Vernon Staley (*The Natural Religion* and *The Catholic Religion*) ; and to the Rev. Dr. Paterson Smyth, Archdeacon of St. Andrew's, Montreal (*Genesis*).

I wish also to acknowledge my indebtedness to my brother, W. M. Short, for many valuable suggestions.

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In some cases the authors have not been quoted fully verbatim ; but the substance of the extracts has been reproduced, as far as possible, in the original words, with such slight adaptations and omissions as seemed to be desirable. These cases are indicated by an asterisk, with, of course, reference to the source of the extracts.

It is my earnest hope that this humble effort will bear fruit.

F. B. S.

February 1917.

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Chapter I

I BELIEVE IN GOD

The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell not : for it was founded upon a rock.—*St. Matthew* vii. 25.

UNLESS we face the great questions involved in what we call " religion," unless the foundations of our religion are truly and firmly laid, unless we have good reasons for our Christian Faith, we shall find that there will come a time when we shall be in grave danger of losing our hold on it, and perhaps of even giving it up altogether. For, to most of us, sooner or later, the day comes when we are called upon to make up our minds and to arrive at some sort of decision upon this the most important matter in our lives.

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Up to a certain age we go to church, we are taught by the clergy or our parents, or we go to Sunday School ; we are taught to believe in God ; we are taught to pray ; we receive instruction on the Creed, the Commandments, and the rest of the Catechism ; and so on. We do not question any of these things. We accept them because we have full confidence in our father and mother or in our teachers—we look up to them, we know that they are much wiser than ourselves, and so we do not think of doubting or questioning what they tell us. But there comes a time when we begin to think for ourselves. Things do not appear in the same light as they did when we were children. We begin to ask ourselves questions. As we grow older we begin to realise the condition of things in which we live. We see that while there is a vast amount of enjoyment and happiness to be got out of our lives, there is at the same time a great deal of pain and misery on all sides, and we ask ourselves, “ Why does God permit these things to be ? ”

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But why do we believe in God at all ?

You exist ; I exist. Naturally we want to know why we exist, whether this life is all, whether there is anything for us beyond the grave. We want to know the why and wherefore, to arrive at some reasonable explanation of the facts of life. We want to know whether there really *is* a great Divine Being Who rules over all.

Now the first thing which strikes us is that mankind generally, in all times, in every country, has felt that he *must* believe in God. We cannot get away from the idea of God. There are, we know, a small number of people who call themselves Atheists, who say there is no God. In this connection a very interesting fact was revealed at the last census taken in India. It is rather difficult for us to realise what a gigantic country India is. But when we are told that its population is over 300,000,000 (about seven times as many people as there are in the British Isles), we get some idea of its vast area. The people of India are very religious, although

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their religions are often degraded and superstitious ; and the census returns give us the very interesting information that only fifteen persons out of these 300,000,000 put themselves down as Atheists. So we have before us this great foundation fact—mankind has in all times in all places declared “ I believe in God.” He may have held quite wrong opinions about God, his idea of God may have been a very poor one, but he has universally declared that there *is* a God.

But what does mankind know about God ? Can he know anything about Him ?

“ A Blackfoot Indian once described the difference between his own religion and that of the white man in the following words : ‘ There are two religions given by the Great Spirit, one in a book for the guidance of the white men who by following its teachings will reach the white man’s heaven ; the other is in the heads of the Indians, in the sky, rocks, rivers, and mountains. And the Red men who listen to God in nature will hear His

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voice, and find at last the heaven beyond.'¹ Now that religion which the Indian described as being in the head and heart of man, in the sky, rocks, rivers, and mountains may be termed Natural Religion. Natural Religion has its foundation in nature—in human nature and in that world around us which is believed to be the revelation of God."²

* How do we know God at all? How do we know anything whatever about God? And we are answered at once by a similar question, How do we know anything about our brother man? How could I, for instance, if I lived with you a month, know anything about you? I never could see the real *you*—the real *you* would be out of my ken, right behind anything I could see. I should judge what your character was through your manifestations. I should hear what you say, I should see what you do, I should watch your conduct . . . so is it we learn to know God—

¹ *The Indians, whence came they?* McLean, 1889, p. 301; quoted in *The Natural Religion*, Staley.

² Staley, *The Natural Religion*, p. 3.

we learn to know Him through His manifestations.¹

In the early days of the Church there lived in North Africa a famous bishop—Augustine, by name; not, however, the Augustine who came to England. As a young man he led a dissolute life. His mother, who was a Christian, prayed earnestly about her son, and eventually Augustine became a Christian and one of the most famous and learned men in the Church. He wrote a book which he called his Confessions, and there he draws a picture of his own feelings. He says that in his mind he questioned the earth about God, and it said, “I am not He.” He asked the sea, the depths, the things which have life, the winds, the birds, the sun, the moon, the stars, and they all told him that they were not the God Whom he was seeking. And then he said, “Ye have told me of my God, that ye are not He; tell me now something of Him.” And they cried out with a loud voice, “He made us.”

¹ Bishop of London, *Reasons for Faith*, p. 11.

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When we look out upon the universe around us our minds want to know what cause, what force, brought this wonderful universe into existence. Everything that happens must have a cause. We shall find that the only satisfactory answer to our question is that the first cause of all things must be a Personal God. In the first place, we shall cry aloud, with David of old, that he is a fool who says there is *no* God. Then, if we consider our own natures, we shall be compelled to admit that God must be a Moral Being, a *Personal* God ; we shall see that “ the consideration of the moral elements of our own nature must lead us to One from Whom those elements have come.”¹ Everywhere around us we see the mighty works of the Creator of the universe. We gaze up into the sky—we behold the sun, the moon, the planets, the stars ; we see in this earth of ours great oceans and mountains ; we realise that great forces are, and have been, at work ; and when we seriously think of

¹ *The Being of God*, p. 132 (Bishop Ellicott) ; quoted in *The Natural Religion*, Staley, p. 119.

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these overwhelmingly immense manifestations of God, we cannot help being filled with wonder and awe. * Then we take a microscope—the little instrument which so greatly magnifies the things we put under it—and immediately new worlds, new creations, new conditions, new life, absolutely unknown before, are unrolled to our vision, and we become convinced that God is as wonderful in the least of His works as in the greatest.¹ What are our thoughts as we contemplate the little twinkling points of light which we call stars. We know that this earth of ours forms part of the solar system ; that in conjunction with a number of other planets it revolves round the sun. We know that the sun is nearly 93,000,000 miles distant from the earth. We know that many of the stars we see are really great blazing suns, larger than our own sun, and that our sun is over a million times the size of this earth. Astronomers tell us that if we take a million times the 93,000,000

¹ Murphy, *Plain-Spoken Sermons*, p. 215.

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miles the earth is distant from the sun, within that enormous space there are only about twenty stars. This will give us some idea of the very long way off the stars are. Astronomers do not talk of so many miles when they wish to tell us how far from the earth any particular star has been computed to be ; they say it is so many " light years " away. Now light travels at the rate of 180,000 miles a second. I will leave you to calculate how much that would be even in one day ! So far away are some of the stars that the light from them has taken thousands of years to travel to us. Why, the mere thought of these marvels bewilders us ! Yet I am afraid we take these wonderful manifestations of God in a very matter-of-fact way. What power is it, we are bound to ask, which keeps our earth moving at nineteen miles a second round the sun ? What power is it that keeps these millions of huge stars moving through space in a solemn orderly march through the heavens ? * You will hear some people say, " These are all the works

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of nature.” I am afraid they have not a very clear idea of what they mean. Where is nature? When did nature begin to be? When men talk about nature they either mean nothing at all, or they really mean God, and might just as well say so.¹

* There is nothing more futile than to imagine that there is the smallest opposition between science and religion—it is one of the most foolish ideas. Truth can never contradict itself. There is not a single scientific discovery of any sort that contradicts belief in God.²

“ When we look out upon the universe the most striking characteristic which presents itself to the mind is that of Order or Law. . . . All the most recent discoveries of science unani-
mously and unhesitatingly proclaim that Order and Law bear undisputed rule in the natural world. . . . A heap of printers’ type, lying in confusion on the ground, suggests neither order nor mind ; but when we find the type set up letter by letter in regular order, and

¹ Murphy, *Plain-Spoken Sermons*, p. 217.

² Bishop of London, *Reasons for Faith*, pp. 13 and 15.

when the book is produced which conveys the thoughts of its author, we at once recognise the action of mind.”¹ Those who study nature find that everything shows that some mind has been at work in designing nature. The adaptation of animals to their surroundings and conditions is very wonderful. Let us take a few instances of this. “The plumage of the ptarmigan, without any effort on its own part, becomes white as snow in winter, and mottled and tinted like the ground in autumn. The markings of the young unfledged plover exactly resemble the beach pebbles among which it hides. The colour of the stoat, which is ruddy brown in summer, changes in winter, in snow regions, into a beautiful white. . . . The butterfly lays its eggs on the very leaves upon which its future progeny like most to feed. Thus the food of the new-comers, in their weakest state, is ready to hand the moment they emerge into life as caterpillars. . . . The woodpecker feeds

¹ Staley, *The Natural Religion*, p. 96.

upon insects lodged chiefly in decaying trees. In order to find its food, nature has supplied it with a bill, straight, hard, and angular, by which it is enabled to bore into the wood, and reach the cell of its prey. But when the cell is reached, how is the insect to be extracted? It is done by means of the bird's tongue, which is of an extraordinary length and tipped with a barbed hook or needle."¹

We all know how regular and orderly everything in nature is; we know that we must conform to the rules and laws of nature. We know that we must place things upright; if we do not, the law of gravitation steps in and our work falls to the ground. We plant our seeds, we live our lives, on the basis that the laws of nature will continue, that the earth will go on revolving, thus giving us day and night, that the seasons will succeed one another in due course, that the laws which govern the growth of the things around us will still operate. We look at the animal

¹ Staley, *The Natural Religion*, pp. 98-100.

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world, we see what a wonderful thing animal life is ; we look at ourselves, we see what a wonderful work the human mind is ; we think of the wonderful capacities which man possesses, both intellectually and spiritually, and we ask how have all these things come about ? Can any one for a moment seriously imagine that all these things are the result of chance ? “ What reasonable explanation is to be given of all the wonderful contrivances and mechanisms which we meet with in such astonishing profusion in nature, so manifold in variety, so amazing in perfection ? Who, we ask, has endowed animals with instincts and habits so marvellously adapted to the fulfilment of necessary ends ? Who has given the sun, the stars, this earth, ‘ a law which cannot be broken ’ ? Who but One possessed of intelligent Mind, boundless Power, and infinite Wisdom ? ” ¹ There cannot be a design without a designer, order without somebody choosing that order ; there cannot

¹ Staley, *The Natural Religion*, p. 102.

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be means suitable to some particular purpose without some one having arranged it all. "What a beautiful mind God must have! What a wonderful mind . . . the great Artist thinking out the whole of His great scheme, perfect in the smallest detail!"¹

What is the result of our reflections upon nature—nature which we have seen is the handiwork of God? Surely it must be to make us feel how very insignificant we are. We feel that God is too wonderful for us to comprehend. And yet very often we are inclined to grumble and complain. We want to know all about God at once. Ought we to expect this? Doesn't it seem rather absurd for us to ask, "Why has God done this?" "Why has He not done that?" How can we hope to understand all this? Take the case of a little child. It would be hopeless for us to try and make him understand the construction of a steam engine, or the mysteries of electricity. Well, we are just like that little

¹ Bishop of London, *Reasons for Faith*, p. 19.

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child. In this life we see, as St. Paul tells us, through a glass darkly ; but we shall see and understand in God's own time. Many things that appear to have gone wrong in the past—the existence of pain, the existence of evil, and so on—perplex and trouble us. But we may be quite sure that there is a solution to all these difficulties. If God has not seen fit to let us know more, shall we, His creatures, grumble at our Creator ?

Our Lord tells us that the pure in heart shall see God. The great thing is to do God's will, and, in thus doing, our knowledge of Him will most certainly increase more and more.

Chapter II

THE BIBLE—WHAT IT IS

THERE is a very old saying that we never know a thing unless we know its beginnings.

* What is the meaning of the thing we call "religion"? Some people think that the word comes from a Latin word which means "something that binds." In that case we may say that religion means the *bond* which binds man to God. Others say that the word comes from a Latin word meaning "to consider." If this be so, we may say that religion means the consideration or reverence for God and divine things.¹

In the previous chapter we saw that we believe in God because we cannot help ourselves. We saw that wherever we go, what-

¹ Staley, *The Natural Religion*, p. 11.

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ever time in history we choose to take, we come up against this fact—that the vast majority of mankind have some sort of belief in God ; and we shall find that no amount of criticism will explain this fact away. We saw that, as we look out upon the universe around us, there is only one answer to the question, “ What cause, what force, brought this wonderful universe into existence ? ” We saw that the first cause of all things must be a Personal God. We saw something of the wonderful design in nature. We saw something of how God works in nature—that nothing is due to chance, everything is governed by certain laws. We saw that there must be a God of boundless power, of utmost wisdom.

Now, if we look at ourselves, we find that each one of us has that wonderful thing which we call conscience. In each one of us there is a sense of duty. There is, as it were, a judge always with us, continually passing judgment on our every action. We have clearly written for us, by conscience, the plain broad rules of right and wrong. It says

to us, "Thou *shalt* do this thing," and "Thou shalt *not* do that thing." And we feel that if we are true to ourselves we ought to *obey* these plain directions given us by our conscience. Whether we like it or not, "conscience is an *authority*. All bow before its power. We may despise its commands, but we must listen to its reproofing voice. . . . We do not command it, but it commands us."¹ It surely must be the voice of God speaking within each one of us.

As we contemplate the wonders of nature and the universe and ourselves, we cry aloud, "We believe in God." And then we ask ourselves this further question, "Has this Almighty, All-Wise, All-Holy God, left us human beings alone, with no more knowledge of Him than we can find out from the revelation of Himself in the mighty works of the universe and nature and this unseen guide within us?" We know that David said, "The heavens declare the glory of God"; but are

¹ *Fundamental Truths*, p. 59 (Luthardt); quoted in *The Natural Religion*, Staley, p. 119.

we to know nothing more? An Arab was once asked, “‘How do you know that there is a God?’” He replied, ‘In the same way that I know on looking at the sand when a man or a beast has crossed the desert—by His footprints in the world around me.’”¹ But you and I want to go farther: we want reasonable answers to the questions, “Whence do we come?” “Why do we exist?” “What are we to do?” “Whither are we going?” “Is there a life beyond this present one?” We want to know how much we are able to know about God, and we want to know how this knowledge has been obtained.

If, as we believe, God *does* exist, it seems only reasonable, only what we should expect, that He should make known His will to His creatures. It seems only what we should naturally look for, that He should speak to men in a way they could understand. To a believer in God and His goodness, it is not conceivable that He should have left us

¹ *Some Elements of Religion*, p. 55 (Liddon); quoted in *The Catholic Religion*, Staley, p. 148.

entirely in the dark as regards Himself. We cannot think that He would leave us ignorant of why He has placed us in this world, what He desires our conduct to be, what He has in store for us, whether there will be an end of all those things which we see are not what they should be.

Having taken up this position—that God would not leave us in the dark—we must use our utmost endeavour to find out what He *has* told us about Himself. We look around us, and we are at once met with a difficulty, for we see not one but many forms of religious faith in the world—Christianity, Mahometanism, Buddhism, Hindooism, etc. How then are we to decide? We shall examine them and compare them. We shall look at the results upon the lives of those professing them. We shall find that one particular religion stands out far beyond all the others. We shall see that the religion of Christ, if it were believed and practised by the whole human race, would transform this world into a place of happiness. And if we ask those who believe in

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Christ to tell us about Him, they would point us to their sacred history book, the Bible, and more especially to the New Testament.

I have said that each one of us has conscience to guide us. The more clearly the voice of conscience makes itself heard, the more diligently must we obey it. But we must not be satisfied with this. We must find out what is the fuller, more direct, revelation which God has given us. Conscience may be compared to the twilight. "The twilight is better than darkness. But the full light is better than the twilight, and to refuse the light and choose the twilight is the same thing as to love the darkness";¹ and so we shall want to find out all about the full light of God's revelation.

Revelation may be compared to the effect upon a room almost wrapped in darkness when the shutters are opened and the full light let in. God has revealed Himself as Almighty, All-Holy, All-Just, All-Merciful.

¹ Gore, *The Creed of the Christian*, p. 31.

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He has revealed His wishes to us, what we are, and what He intends for us. We Christians maintain that in the Bible we *do* possess the record of God's revelation to man—the story of how He has revealed, has made Himself known, in a direct way to the human race.

In the early days of Christianity the collection of sacred writings was called by a Greek word meaning "The Books." From this Greek word we get our word "Bible." After a time the collection began to be called "*The Book*." But the original name tells us that the Bible is a book *made up of books*. As a matter of fact, it contains over sixty books. So we may describe the Bible as the collection of writings which contain the record of God's special dealings with the human race.

We hear a great deal nowadays of attacks on the Bible. We hear things said about the Bible at the street-corners; we hear things said among those with whom we work in the office or in the workshop, things to which we do not easily see the answer.

Now it is very necessary to grasp this fact

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clearly and to remember it. *Many difficulties which men experience in connection with the Bible arise simply from their not understanding what the Bible really is.*

We call the Bible the *Inspired* Word of God. What do we mean by this? Let us see first what we do *not* mean. We certainly do *not* mean that every letter or statement of the Bible is inspired and is perfectly accurate. We know that David talks about "the earth being so fast that it cannot be moved at any time." Yet we know that this earth is rushing round the sun at the enormous speed of over 1,000 miles a minute. Although we know that this statement made by David is incorrect, we must all admit when we read the wonderful psalms which he wrote that God *did* make Himself known to David.

"If it is pointed out to us that it is impossible for 50,000 men to have been slaughtered at Bethshemesh (1 Sam. vi. 19), as the village probably only contained a few hundred, we cheerfully feel sure that there must be some mistake in the numbers—a very likely thing to

happen, because a dot in the Hebrew language makes a difference of many hundreds.”¹

Clever men have sometimes been misled by their imperfect knowledge, and have said that certain statements in the Bible are false. For instance, they used to say that the statement in the story of Creation that God made light on the first day was incorrect, because the sun was not made until the fourth day of creation. Modern discovery has now proved that the statement is quite true.

We must remember that it is not the *books* but the *men* who wrote them who were inspired. “God conveys infallibly to men the truth which He wills to reveal, and yet leaves them free to express it *in their own words, through their own minds, and in accordance with the current ideas of their own times*. . . . We need not shrink from admitting that there may be inaccuracies and discrepancies in the Bible as to historical or scientific fact; but such mistakes, where apparent, in no case

¹ Bishop of London, *Popular Objections to Christianity*, p. 46.

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touch essential truths or affect the moral purpose of the revelation.”¹

The Bible is divided into two great parts—the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is made up of many different kinds of books. It tells us something about the beginning of things, and of the beginning of the human race; then about God's dealings with the chosen race; one of its books is made up of wise sayings, one is a book of Psalms, others contain God's messages spoken to His people through His prophets. The Old Testament was the Bible of the Jews—the Bible read and re-read by our Lord.

The New Testament is like the Old in that it is made up of many books written by many writers. The first four books are the Gospels; another is a history of the early Christian Church, and of the work of one of its greatest missionaries. Then there are a number of Epistles or Letters written mostly to the Church in particular places. The last book

¹ Staley, *The Natural Religion*, p. 347.

contains a wonderful mysterious "Revelation" to the Apostle St. John.

The importance of the Bible lies in this—it teaches us about the great truths of God's revelation of Himself to mankind. It is quite a wrong idea to imagine that all the books of the Bible are on the same level. Some are far more important than others, some are far more full of spiritual truths than others. And yet even in what we may consider the least important books we can learn a great deal.

* An argument often used against the Bible is that it is only *one* of the *many* sacred books of the world, a little better than the others perhaps, but still only one among many. But the people who talk thus do not stop to find out what the sacred books of other religions are like. If they did they would find them a mass of superstition, a collection of strange dreams, very often gross impurity, with only a few passages here and there which gleam with the truth.¹ If we place the best of these

¹ Fitchett, *The Beliefs of Unbelief*, pp. 259-261.

other sacred books side by side with the Bible we find that they cannot be mentioned in the same breath. Listen to Professor Max-Müller—a man of vast intellect, a man who made a most profound study of these other sacred books. He says, “ Christ is the fulfilment of all the world has been longing for and striving after. How shall I describe what I found in the New Testament? I had not read it for many years, and was prejudiced against it before I took it in hand. The light which struck Paul with blindness on his way to Damascus was not more strange than that which fell on me when I suddenly discovered the fulfilment of all hopes, the highest perfection of philosophy, the key to all the seeming contradictions of the physical and moral world. The whole world seemed to me to be ordered for the sole purpose of furthering the religion of the Redeemer; and if this religion is not Divine, I understand nothing at all. In all my studies of the ancient times, I have always felt the want of something, and it was not until I knew our Lord that all was clear to me. With Him, there is nothing I am

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unable to solve.”¹ These are the words of one of the most learned men of recent times. We must remember that everything good in any other religion is found in Christianity.

* The Bible is the best, the most precious, the most wonderful, and yet, at the same time, the cheapest book in all the world. If we were asked to give five pounds for an ordinary Bible we should be horrified, because we know we can purchase one for as many pence. And yet, supposing the very lowest price was not five pounds but five hundred pounds, the Bible would still be the cheapest Book in all the world. And what is the result? Why this—that while every one can afford a Bible, it is not every one who values it or takes the trouble to read it.² What do we find at the present day? People will read volume after volume of ordinary novels, they will read the newspapers and magazines with great diligence, they will study books on science for

¹ Letter to a friend, quoted in *The Beliefs of Unbelief*, Fitchett.

² Murphy, *Plain-Spoken Sermons*, p. 7.

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years, and yet they will hardly ever open their Bible to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" its precious contents. In the old days when the Bibles were but few and were chained to a desk in the parish churches, people used to crowd to the churches to hear it read, and to read it themselves.

Just as the sailor's compass guides him safe to the haven, just as the chart shows him how to avoid the rocks and treacherous channels, so does the Bible guide and point out the way to God to those willing to learn from it. We should remember, however, that we must study the Bible intelligently. If we want to know the meaning of any particular part of the Scriptures, we must take as our guide the interpretation put upon it by God's Church. Yet many people, often possessing but little knowledge, have put their own meaning on certain passages in the Bible, others have attached great importance to one particular doctrine and neglected other equally important truths, and in these ways very much harm has been done.

Many of us have heard or read about what

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is known as the Higher Criticism. What does this mean? Learned men, especially professors in Germany, have, during the last hundred years, brought forward many strange theories and ideas concerning both the Old Testament and the New Testament. But we can see how little is the value of these theories when we realise that what one professor puts forward is soon contradicted by another professor, and that one theory after another is found to be wrong. Again, some clever men, by a very close examination of the Old Testament, came to the conclusion that parts of some of the books which everybody had thought to be the oldest had really been written at a later period, and naturally this disturbed a good many people. But, after all, even if it is so, what does it amount to? Simply this. Supposing I were to set about writing a History of England, I might make extracts from the ancient records, and from histories written many centuries ago, and I might make use of histories written quite recently. I might use the actual words

employed in the old chronicles and previous histories ; or, I might write about these same things but put them in my own words. The facts and meaning would still be the same as in the original records, only told in different words and style. So with the Bible. If parts of it were rewritten by later prophets or priests, that does not alter the facts—they are still the same. Indeed, we may say that, in spite of all the criticism levelled against it, the truth of the Bible remains undisturbed.

To many people the first few chapters of Genesis are a source of much difficulty and perplexity. The story of the Creation, the story of the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man, have frequently been causes of stumbling ; many have felt themselves unable to accept these stories.¹

In the preface which St. Luke wrote to

¹ The material for the remaining part of this chapter has been largely drawn from *Genesis, The Bible for the Young*, Paterson Smyth.

his Gospel he tells us that before our Four Gospels were written there were many accounts of our Lord's life already in existence. And some of the Old Testament writers tell us of accounts already written of the facts which they themselves record, and it is very probable that they were guided to put into their books much older stories and histories.

Now the Creation story in the Bible is believed with good reason to be perhaps the oldest of such stories. Some people think it older by far than Moses, older by far than the book of Genesis into which it has been inserted ; very likely far older than Abraham. Perhaps we sometimes wonder what the human race did for want of a Bible before Moses lived. How did men during all those centuries, before his time, learn anything about God ? Let us see whether we can throw any light on this. Until quite recently it was thought that in the very ancient days writing was unknown. But recent discoveries have taught us that even long before Abraham's time writing was common ; and

Abraham, we must remember, lived some hundredss of years before Moses. People in those ancient days used to write on clay tablets and cylinders. During the nineteenth century clever men learnt how to decipher the writing on these tablets, and great numbers of these writings have been dug up from the ruins of the ancient cities of Assyria, Egypt, and elsewhere. Thousands of them are in the British Museum, and from them it can easily be seen how widely this form of writing was in use. Some of these unearthed tablets formed part of the libraries of the ancient kings, and through the inscriptions on them we now know a great deal about the history of Assyria and Babylonia, and much light has been thrown on the language, history, and learning of the Jews. There is therefore nothing impossible, or even improbable, in imagining that Abraham and those before him possessed their written Bible, consisting, perhaps, chiefly of the stories of the Creation, the Fall, and the Flood. Before man had acquired the art of writing, these stories would

of course have been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth.

Not many years ago, on the site of ancient Nineveh, which is in that part of Asia where was Abraham's home in Chaldea, a set of tiles or tablets was unearthed. It was discovered that what was written on them was another Creation story—very much like the Bible story in some respects, but also very much unlike it in others. One great difference is that in this story not One God but many are referred to. Some people think that this Creation story was originally the same as the one in the Bible, that it had not been preserved in its true form, but had in the course of many hundreds of years been altered and become corrupt and debased. When we compare this Chaldean story and the stories of ancient Egypt and Greece with the Bible story, we see how infinitely above them is the story which is told in the first chapters of Genesis. There is no reason at all why God should not have revealed to the first human beings these facts about creation. What a

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wonderful story it is ! What could be more simply magnificent than the opening words, " In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth " ; and again, " God said, Let there be light, and there was light."

" The story of the Creation is not intended to be a chapter of science made easy. Undoubtedly it is a statement of the main facts which even modern discoveries support."¹ This is what Professor Romanes says : " The order in which the flora and fauna are said by the Mosaic account to have appeared upon the earth corresponds with that which the theory of Evolution requires, and the evidence of geology proves."

That such a difficult subject as the creation has been told so accurately, and, at the same time, in such a simple form, forces us to the conclusion that the story was revealed by God. For if this were not so, then we must suppose that the writer of Genesis was possessed of scientific knowledge which has only

¹ Griffinhoofe, *Helps towards Belief in the Christian Faith*, p. 166.

recently been acquired by mankind after many centuries of discovery and patient investigation !

In the second chapter of Genesis we have a second Creation story, differing from the one in the first chapter, just as one Gospel differs from another, yet helping to make more complete the lesson which God wished to teach. While the teaching about God and man is the same in both, this second version is not particular to give the same order of creation. But we must remember that "the purpose of the Creation story was to teach the truth of the existence of One Personal God Who created all things, and in that purpose the story amply succeeded."¹ When a child asks us questions about the phenomena of nature, we do not give him scientifically correct accounts, for the simple reason that he would not be able to understand us if we did. We consider the capacity of the child's mind, and impart to him such

¹ Griffinhoofe, *Helps towards Belief in the Christian Faith*, p. 167

knowledge as he is capable of receiving in a simple but necessarily imperfect and incomplete form. And so we can understand that the story would be told to men in such a way that it would be true, would help them, and make them realise their relation as creatures to their Creator, and yet so simply that they could easily understand and remember it, and pass it on by word of mouth to their children. At the same time, it would be necessary to give an account of creation which would not have to be flung aside in the future ages, when the human race discovered and grew capable of understanding more completely the manner and method of creation. Does not the story in Genesis accomplish these purposes? If so, then surely it must have come from God. Is it not simple enough for the youngest child to understand and remember? Is it not full of the greatest conceptions of the majesty of God, and of the dignity of man as the crowning work of creation and the child of God? And yet this simple story is so true that it has not had to be flung aside

in the light of the increasing knowledge of the human race. It has only been necessary to enlarge it, and to fill in the details. /

During recent years scientific men have been finding out something of *how* things were made. They have also been teaching us the marvellous discoveries of Evolution—of germs of life evolved or developed through one stage after another for vast numbers of years—and foolish hasty people said, “These new theories prove the Bible is wrong.” But *do* they overthrow the Bible? Many people were perplexed, but when they came to consider they saw that there was no need to be alarmed, that there was no contradiction of the Bible story. They saw that creation would be just as wonderful if it were slow and gradual. In an instant of time God could have created the animal world as we know it now ; but if He ordained that this result should be brought about by slow development from some very simple form of life through many successive forms, each in advance of the other, the complete

process occupying a vast period of time, surely His greatness is no less manifest. People saw that this process of gradual development was but a filling-in of the details of the simple story. They saw that it was but just the same way in which God works now. He could instantaneously make a mighty oak, but surely it is not less wonderful if He should only make the little acorn which contains within it the germ of a mighty oak tree endowed with power to carry on a succession of mighty trees through ages to come. God could have made everything in six days, but it is quite clear that the word "day" in the Creation story does not refer to an ordinary day, since the sun—the divider into days—was not made until the fourth day. Scientific men tell us that the world has the appearance of having been made very slowly, and that probably it was "in the making" many millions of years. But we must remember that to God "a thousand years are but as yesterday." It is interesting to notice that the stories of creation seem to be the reason

why the ancient races—the Phœnicians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and the Greeks—all observed a week of seven days.

The earth, vegetation, the sun, the moon, the fishes, the birds, the beasts and cattle, had been made and pronounced good. Then we are told that God said, "Let us make man in our image after our likeness." He was now going to make the noblest thing of all—a being with some of God's own nature in him, a being with a free will, one who could obey or disobey as he pleased, a being of perfect purity and innocence. But innocence is not the highest stage of goodness. Which is the higher form of goodness—the innocence of the little child who does not know anything about evil, and has never had to choose between good and evil, or the strong brave righteousness of a man or woman who does know about evil, but who by God's grace has refused to have anything to do with it? God says, "Choose between good and evil." That seems to be the way in which God makes character. Thoughts such as these may help

us to understand something of the story of the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden. What is the meaning of the trees with the mystical names—the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? And what is the meaning of the serpent which speaks to the woman words of temptation to sin and doubt about God? The talking serpent and the mystical trees seem to suggest that, as many great Christian thinkers from the earliest times have thought, the story of the Garden of Eden is not entirely a record of actual facts, but an allegory, in which the real and the illustration are combined. Perhaps this is so. We do not know; but it does not really matter. The meaning is perfectly clear: that Adam and Eve, by choosing evil, by trying what evil was like, brought sin into this world. In some way—perhaps, as the story says, by forbidding them to eat of an actual tree; perhaps in some other way—the alternative of right and wrong, the choice of good or evil, was presented to their minds; and they chose evil.

We get no hint from the story itself that the serpent is anything but an ordinary serpent, but the Book of Revelation tells us of "that old serpent the devil." We know that in past ages, to those other beings—the angels—the test of the knowledge of good and evil had come. Some of them chose to try evil, and it seems only natural to assume that by the serpent is meant the devil—Satan—who from being an angel of light had now become so evil that he deliberately set himself to spoil God's work. The story tells us how man was persuaded to disobey God's command, and then of the sad results of his disobedience. Does it matter to *us* that the first of our race turned to wrong instead of right? Does God punish *us* for what one man and woman did thousands of years ago? Certainly not. But by man's own action *evil got into human nature*. We know how there is often a likeness between parents and children, a likeness in looks, a likeness in character and ways also. Sometimes when a boy has a bad temper, or a cowardly spirit, we

hear it said, "Oh, he inherited that from his father or grandfather." That character is thus handed down is a very solemn fact, but it is true. So badness got into our race, and it is now harder for us to be good and easier to be evil, because mankind at the beginning did wrong, and continued to do wrong.

But the story goes on to tell of God's promise of a remedy for the terrible catastrophe—the mysterious remedy which we know was to be the coming of His own Son, to provide a way for man to regain what he had lost. In the light of after events, the promise of a deliverer in the person of some one born of woman, who should deal a crushing blow to the serpent, and who in the conflict should himself suffer, seems to compel us to believe that this is a real account—partly allegorical perhaps—of man's early history and fall from his sinless state. Listen to the words of the promise, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise

thy *head* and thou shalt bruise his *heel*." How wonderfully this promise was completely fulfilled by our Lord !

It is a long time between the Fall of Man and the Flood—probably many hundreds of years. The human race have in some directions made a good deal of progress ; we read of their making tools and musical instruments, of their living in cities, and so on. But alas ! they are falling more and more from righteousness, the one thing which God desired for them. And this brings us to the punishment for their iniquity—the Flood. Recent discoveries seem to prove that the Deluge may have been of wide extent. Clearly a flood took place, for in the records of most of the early races of the world we find, besides stories of the creation, stories of a great flood, and these stories are much like one another. So we need not worry because some people are not convinced and do not believe the story.

“ In the story of the Fall, the Garden and the mysterious trees, the serpent and the flaming sword—these things may, for all we

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know, be details in the Divine picture-book ; but a great force of lofty teaching lies behind. Clearly these great truths are insisted on : that man may make or mar his life ; that he possesses the power of choice between good and evil ; that there is ever at hand some evil power ready to tempt him towards doing what, though it may look pleasant, is yet wrong, and that the wrongness consists in opposition to the will of God, which constitutes sin.”¹

It is well for us to remember that our Lord quite clearly sets His authority on certain incidents in these early chapters of the Bible.

In the nineteenth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel we read, “ The Pharisees also came unto Him, tempting Him, and saying unto Him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause ? And He answered and said unto them, Have ye not read that He which made them at the beginning made them male

¹ Griffinhoofe, *Helps towards Belief in the Christian Faith*, p. 167.

and female. And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh." *These are the words in the second chapter of Genesis*; and then our Lord goes on to comment on them and says, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder."

And in the twenty-third chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel we read of the "woes" which our Lord pronounced against the hypocrisy of the Jews. These are the words He uses: "Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Wherefore behold I send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes, and some of them ye shall kill and crucify, and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues and persecute them from city to city. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of *righteous Abel* unto the blood of

Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation."

And in the seventeenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel we find our Lord uses these words : " As it was *in the days of Noe*, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, *until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all*. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed."

Though we shall find in the Bible things which we cannot understand, do not let us make difficulties unnecessarily. Let us remember that although the Bible contains the account of God's revelation of Himself to mankind, it does not follow that everything in it is of the same importance. The story of God's dealings with us is told through the medium of human writers, and if we bear this in mind it will help us when we come across passages which perplex us. After all, there

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is so much the Bible tells us and teaches us, so much of it speaks to us with the most convincing authority, that we shall have no time or inclination to trouble about those unimportant matters which people so often, and so unnecessarily, worry over.

Everything in the Bible centres round the revelation of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is always pointing forward to the coming of a great Deliverer of mankind. The New Testament tells us about this great Deliverer. It tells us of the central fact of human history, of the most stupendous event that has ever happened in this world of ours : an event, the greatness of which we so often fail to realise, perhaps from our very familiarity with the fact—the fact that the Son of God, the Maker of the universe, actually Himself came into this world, took human form, walked and talked, and did marvellous things among men, made God known unto men as He had never been known before.

We may perhaps never have had any doubts that these things did actually happen ; we may

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believe them because other people in whom we have perfect confidence do so. Still, it is well to make our faith strong and firm by finding out what are the foundations on which it is built, and why we believe this wonderful story to be true.

Chapter III

THE WITNESS OF HISTORY TO CHRIST

CAN I be *sure* about the *truth* of Christianity? This is the question many people anxiously ask. They have read all about Christ in the Gospels, they would like to believe in Him, but they have some doubt in their minds as to whether it is all true. Again, it is the case with many who have been brought up Christians, who have accepted all they have been taught about Christ, who have looked upon the Bible as the truth, that suddenly the question is put to them: "But *why* do you say it is true?"; and they find themselves at a loss for an answer.

Now we ought to be able to give some answer to this question. And there *are* answers—and many answers. We will first consider what we may call a preliminary

answer, but nevertheless a very important one.

If any fact of history be true, it is this—it is certainly undeniable that Jesus Christ was put to death in Judæa by the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, and that after His death the religion which takes His name grew very rapidly.

We will not go for our information on this point to any Christian sources, but will just see what an eminent heathen historian tells us. This historian—Tacitus by name—was a Roman, and lived in the first century. He wrote what are called his “Annals,” or history, somewhere about the year A.D. 105. In this history he began with the death of Augustus the Emperor, A.D. 14, and ended with the death of the Emperor Nero in the year A.D. 68. He tells us all about the great fire at Rome in the tenth year (A.D. 64) of Nero’s reign, a fire which destroyed a great part of the city ; he tells us how Nero gave orders for the rebuilding and beautifying of the city, but that this did not do away with the fact that the people

of Rome commonly believed that he himself had ordered it to be set on fire ; he tells us that to put an end to this report the Emperor procured others to be accused, and inflicted terrible punishment upon these people, commonly known by the name of Christians ; he tells us they got their name from Christus, who was put to death as a criminal by the procurator Pontius Pilate, in the reign of Tiberius ; that this pernicious superstition, though checked for a while, broke out again and spread not only over Judæa but to Rome also. He tells us that great numbers of these Christians were put to death by Nero in a cruel manner—that some were crucified, others daubed over with pitch and then set light to, and so burned to death ; he tells us that Nero so enjoyed watching their sufferings that at last even the populace, though used to witnessing cruel spectacles, were disgusted at such excessive cruelty.

We thus see to what an extent Christianity had increased within thirty years of Christ's ascension into heaven. So here we have

these facts attested by an outside authority—a heathen Roman historian: “(1) That our Saviour was put to death as a malefactor by Pontius Pilate, procurator under Tiberius; (2) that from Christ the people called Christians had their name and religion; (3) that this superstition, or religion, had its rise in Judæa; (4) that it spread there notwithstanding the ignominious death of the Founder of it and the opposition which His followers met with from the people of the country afterwards; (5) that from Judæa it was propagated into other parts of the world and as far as Rome, where in Nero’s reign, in the year 64, and even before that time, Christians were very numerous; and (6) that those who professed this religion were reproached and hated, and underwent many and grievous sufferings.”¹

Now there are two things we know of Tacitus: (1) that he was a very reliable historian, and (2) that he was a conscientious

¹ See Dr. Lardner’s Works, quoted in *Christian Evidences*, p. 127, Kennedy.

man. We must remember also that just as our English Government keeps records of the events that happen, so the Roman Government kept its records. If we look in our history books we shall find that in the latter half of the first century Julius Agricola was Governor of Britain, which had just been conquered by the Romans. Julius Agricola had held high offices of honour and trust under several Emperors. The historian Tacitus was his son-in-law, and thus a man in a very high position in life. He would therefore be able to obtain all the facts for his history from the public documents: from Acts or Doings of the Senate (the Senate was the body which corresponded to our Parliament), the Acts of the City and people of Rome, the Acts of other cities, and similar sources. The facts of his history were accordingly as well known to him as if he had been an eyewitness.

Let us also see what Pliny, another heathen writer, says. His letters contain important information about the first Christians. He lived at the same time as Tacitus, and was his

friend. Having been appointed by the Emperor Trajan to be Governor over the province of Bithynia in the north of Asia Minor, he found himself very much disturbed because his province contained so many Christians. He therefore wrote a letter to the Emperor asking for instructions, and in this letter he gives us some very interesting details about the Christians. He tells the Emperor that so numerous were the Christians that he found the heathen temples almost forsaken, and that only few sacrifices were offered to the heathen gods ; that the Christians were of all ages and of every rank in life, and were to be found not only in the big cities, but in the smaller towns and in the country.

The new Governor called upon the Christians to worship the false gods and the Emperor's image, and those who refused were tortured and put to death. He says that he could discover no real crime against them, only that they were Christians and repudiated the Roman gods. Why was it, it may be asked, that the Roman Government persecuted the

Christians in this way? It was because the new religion denied the truth of nearly all the heathen worship. It told the heathen world, "Your gods are no gods; your religions are all false." "You must believe in Christ; you must reform your lives on the standard set up by Him." The new religion meant that the statues, the altars, the temples to these false gods must all be overthrown. We must also remember that in the Roman Empire in those days the religion was a part of the State. Many of the religious offices were administered by the magistrates, and all opposition such as Christianity to the established worship was looked upon as direct opposition to the authority of the Government. Moreover, as Christianity directly attacked the gross immorality and other sins which prevailed so terribly at the time, we shall not wonder that the Christians had to suffer so much persecution. In his letter Pliny does not explain *who* the Christians were. Why was this? Simply because the Emperor knew quite well. From this we see that

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Christianity was not a new thing. To have produced the effects which Pliny tells us it had produced, it must have existed in the province of Bithynia for many years. Now if this were the case in this far-away part of Asia, we may safely say that the same state of things existed more or less all over the Roman Empire—and this within seventy years of our Lord's death. In his letters he also mentions the very important fact that the Christians sang hymns to Christ *as to God*. "The fear of torture and death could not induce them to worship the image of the Emperor or the statues of the gods, or do aught that savoured of idolatry, but they sang hymns to Christ as to God. We now combine the testimony of Tacitus and Pliny. The one tells us of His death as a malefactor in the days of Tiberius ; the other tells us that His followers, according to their own statements, were accustomed to worship Him." ¹

These facts about our Lord would be certain

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 130.

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and indisputable had the New Testament never been written. We may well ask the question, " Was it at all likely that these people would be willing to undergo such terrible sufferings and deaths unless they were absolutely convinced that what they believed was true ? " They could have ended their sufferings at any time by offering a grain of incense to the false gods. And yet history tells us that great numbers were tortured and put to death because they would not give up this new religion !

Chapter IV

THE GOSPELS A TRUE STORY

* THE proof of the existence of any great character in history, say of Homer, Alexander the Great, or Julius Cæsar, does not consist in a legal certificate of their birth. It is found in the results of their lives, in the mark that they have made on history.

Shakespeare lived less than four hundred years ago. And yet how little of first-hand and detailed evidence exists about him. The dates of his birth, his marriage, his plays, are all matters of dispute ; the story of his life is very incomplete. Yet nobody wants all these details before believing that there *was* a Shakespeare. And why ? Because his plays are his credentials. We cannot deny that some one lived and wrote these magnificent plays. And such arguments as these, multi-

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plied a hundredfold, are the evidence that there did live on this earth such a one as Jesus Christ. Why, our very almanac is dated from His birth! We call this the year 1917 Anno Domini—"in the year of the Lord."¹ The fact that Christianity existed in so many countries within so short a time after our Lord's life is a proof that He did really exist; that He is *not* an imaginary figure. Subsequent history, taken as a whole, is unintelligible without Him. There is no doubt that Christianity has changed the entire course of history; and the more we examine it the more shall we be convinced that Christianity cannot be explained if we leave out Christ.

The history of the civilised world is a record of the *effect* which His life has produced on the human race. We cannot get away from the fact that we have got to *account* for Christianity. What caused it to start? How was it that it made such wonderful progress in its early years, especially in Jerusalem and the

¹ Fitchett, *The Beliefs of Unbelief*, pp. 176-7.

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Holy Land, among the people who knew all the facts. We cannot get away from this—that “a Jewish peasant *changed* the religion of the world, and that, without force, without power, without support; without one natural source, or circumstance of attraction, influence, or success.”¹

We have seen that the facts that our Lord lived and was put to death under Pontius Pilate, and that His followers worshipped Him as God, would be undeniable if the Gospels had never been written, for we have the evidence of heathen historians that these things were so. We have seen that within a very few years this new religion had spread over a great part of the Roman Empire, and that the Christians, in spite of persecution, were very numerous; so much so that the worship of the false gods was much neglected. The man who disputes these things shows that he is unable to recognise obvious facts. Now to whom shall we go for a *history* of this Christ? We shall naturally go “to those who had

¹ Paley, *Evidences of Christianity*.

personal knowledge of Him, and of the events which followed His death and alleged Resurrection, and who had sympathy with all that bore His name. None but such were competent to write the history. . . . They risked life, and sacrificed all that is commonly valued in this life, to maintain and spread what we now call Christianity.”¹ And we should naturally expect them to have written for the benefit of their own age and of the generations to come after them the story of what they believed and knew about Christ, the founder of their religion, Whom they believed to be the very Son of God.

“Have we then histories that purport to be original records of the Christ, and that were accepted by His earliest followers as written by those who had competent knowledge and a personal faith in what they wrote? We have—in what are known as the Four Gospels, and in that which is a supplement to the Gospels, the book known as The Acts of the Apostles.”²

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 132.

² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

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There are no rival histories. How is it that there is *no trace of any other story* accounting for Christianity? Here we have a great event—the appearance in the world of a new religion, wonderful in its doctrines, wonderful in the results it produced, yet there are no other accounts of what caused it. We find, moreover, that what the heathen historians tell us about this new religion, which was turning the world upside down, agrees with what we find in the Gospels. Even those who are not Christians and those who criticise Christianity recognise Christ as the central phenomenon of history.

“ If the life of Jesus Christ be denied, the new force which then came into the world, and the general improvement in the tone of the world’s morality, cannot be explained. Admit the claims of Jesus Christ, and all is clear. Deny them, and history becomes an inexplicable tangle.”¹

Now if it could be said that these re-

¹ Griffinhoofe, *Helps towards Belief in the Christian Faith*, p. 85.

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cords of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles were written many years after the events they describe, we might have reason to doubt their accuracy. But, as a matter of fact, it can be proved beyond all reasonable doubt that they were written soon after the very time in which the events recorded took place. There is no book in the world which has been subjected to so much criticism as the New Testament, and it is generally agreed by the critics that the Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles were written during the first century—the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 70.

Let us see what evidence there is that the four Gospels which we possess were in existence at a very early date, and were written at the very time in which the events they record were being preached to the world by those who had actually witnessed those events, or had full means of knowing those events to be true.

There is the evidence of some letters written by Irenæus. He “ describes the four

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Gospels which were universally received by the Christian Churches of his day as the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, in such a way that no one doubts but that they were the Gospels now in our hands. He describes the Acts of the Apostles as written by Luke, the author of the third Gospel.”¹ Moreover, he quotes from the Gospels about five hundred times. Irenæus became Bishop of Lyons in the second century. In his young days he had been taught by Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna in Asia Minor, and Polycarp had been a personal disciple of the Apostle St. John. In his letters Irenæus says, “I can describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp used to sit when he discoursed, and his goings-out and his comings-in, his manner of life, and his personal appearance, and the discourses which he held before the people ; how he would describe his intercourse with John, and with the rest who had seen the Lord, and how he would relate their

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 133.

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words. And whatsoever things he had heard from them about the Lord and about His miracles and about His teaching, Polycarp, as having received them from eyewitnesses of the life of the Lord, could relate *altogether in accordance with the Scriptures.*"¹ When we remember that Irenæus had been instructed by Polycarp, who had been taught by St. John himself, what he says convinces us that the Gospels must be genuine, that they are true accounts of what actually took place.

We will take just one other authority. Justin Martyr, writing in the second century, about the year 140, says, "Memoirs, memoirs of Apostles, memoirs drawn up by Apostles and those who followed them, memoirs which are composed by them, which are called Gospels, are being read in Christian Churches." Justin Martyr quotes a great deal from these "Memoirs," and we find that the quotations agree with the Gospels as we have them now. So here we have testimony—and, of course,

¹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*.

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much more evidence might be produced—that our four Gospels were received by the Christian Church as original and authoritative from a period clearly before the end of the first century. We must remember that the Apostle St. John lived till almost the close of that century.

If further proof be wanted, we have it in this fact—that “by the middle of the second century, if not sooner, translations of the Four Gospels which are in our hands existed in Syriac in the far East, and in Latin among the Roman colonists in Africa. They were made independently of each other; that is, the one was not made from the other. Nor were the two made from the same copies of the great original. This is demonstrable by the character of the translations;”¹ and, of course, it follows that the originals must have been in existence a considerable time before.

* Assuming now, as we are entitled to do, that our Gospels were accepted in the first

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 135.

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century as genuine histories of Christ—and that no others were—we may be sure of these two things: (*a*) that they could not have been so accepted unless they were in general agreement with what was already known of Christ by the Churches through the preaching of His Apostles; and (*b*) that it was not possible for a history of Christ to gain the confidence of the Churches without the sanction, direct or indirect, of an Apostle.¹ We cannot imagine that the Christians of the apostolic times, and the generations which immediately followed, would have accepted accounts of their Master's life which were false; and we may be sure that the Gospels would not have been accepted unless they had the sanction of the Apostles themselves.

There is another important check on the Gospel story. Can we compare it with non-historical documents which every one agrees existed with the beginnings of Christianity? "Documents of this order—such as letters,

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 136.

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monuments, medals, inscriptions—are confessedly of great importance. Now, happily, we have such documents with which to compare our Gospel histories.”¹

They consist of *letters* written by a man who was brought up and taught at a famous seat of learning, one whom we should call a clever university man, a man of great intellect. They are the letters of the Apostle Paul, which those who have criticised and examined the New Testament in a very exhaustive manner agree to be genuine letters written within less than thirty years of our Lord’s Ascension.

St. Paul wrote letters to the Christians in Rome. “Rome was the centre of the Empire—a city as important as London is to-day. To it came every detail of provincial and colonial administration. All that was done in the provinces was fully known at Rome. Maps and records of every place were carefully kept up to date; to Rome all the legions

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 137.

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came back after foreign service; to it the Governors returned after their rule in the provinces was over.”¹ The many men of learning and position in Rome to whom St. Paul wrote would therefore be in a position to make full inquiries, and would never have become Christians unless they felt sure that the facts which he preached were so.

* Then he wrote letters to the Christians at Ephesus. Ephesus was the greatest place of trade in Asia, a city next in importance to Rome itself. Even now its ruins astonish us. It possessed the largest Greek heathen temple ever constructed. Its harbour was one of the finest in the Mediterranean, and was always full of vessels from every part of the Empire.²

Then he wrote letters to the Christians at Corinth. Corinth was a city specially renowned for its great learning and commerce.

“ From one of these great cities St. Paul, living doubtless in the midst of friends, of whom some, at least, were of influential posi-

¹ Griffinhoofe, *Helps towards Belief in the Christian Faith*, p. 99.

² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

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tion, wrote to his friends living in the other city. In his letter he bases all his arguments on the fact that Christ was risen. His words meant no less than this: 'Christ is risen from the dead, and you cannot deny it—nay you know that it is true, for the fact of His resurrection is well known, and the greater part of 500 persons who saw Him alive after His resurrection are at this moment living in the world. And because Christ did thus rise, you are bound to believe in the resurrection of the dead.' We must remember that it was only twenty-five years after these events that St. Paul wrote thus."¹ Twenty-five years only! Let us think of any important event which happened twenty-five years ago. Suppose that some one should declare that such an event never took place, would his statement be believed by any reasonable man? We know that it would not, because the fact that the event actually did occur could be verified from innumerable sources.

¹ Griffinhoofe, *Helps towards Belief in the Christian Faith*, p. 101.

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“ St. Paul could write as he did, and press his argument home, because Christ had risen indeed, and had appeared to *many*, and because subsequently *the power of the Spirit had been made manifest* through the Apostles in all the world.”¹

“ Now these letters of St. Paul and the Four Gospels are in perfect harmony. The letters do not repeat the facts contained in the Gospels—there was no reason why they should—but they refer incidentally to many of them, and these the most important because they relate to the person and work of Jesus Christ.”² These facts referred to incidentally by St. Paul (as things well known to those to whom he was writing) have sometimes been called the Fifth Gospel, and we find that they agree altogether with the facts as stated in the Gospels.

Again, we find that the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles agree with all that is known of

¹ Griffinhoofe, *Helps towards Belief in the Christian Faith*, p. 103.

² Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, pp. 137-8.

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the events that happened at the same time and of the modes of living during this period. The events of the Gospel took place in a Roman province, and we can therefore test all the references in the Gospels by Roman history. One reason why we feel so convinced that the Gospels were written at such an early date is this. We know, from other sources, that during the time with which they deal the Holy Land went through many changes in its form of government. It was under a peculiar system of double government, partly Jewish and partly Roman. Now not only does the story in the New Testament testify in a remarkable way to this two-fold form of government, which involved a two-fold form of taxation, two modes of capital punishment, two methods of keeping the time, two military forces, and so on, but we find mixed up among the Greek (in which the New Testament was written) Latin and Hebrew names of things. This condition of things could have been natural to the Holy Land only during the period to which the New Testament has refer-

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ence, *i.e.* the time before the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place forty years after Christ's Ascension. The terrible war which ended in the total destruction of Jerusalem (600,000 perished in the siege) produced so great a change in the state of the country and the condition of the Jews, that only those who had lived under the previous peculiar conditions could write about them accurately, as we find the writers of the Gospels have done,—any one else would find it impossible to avoid making mistakes. We find that references to the Roman Empire, the Roman Governors, their characters and actions, all the little references to the way in which people lived and to the manners and customs of the period agree with the accounts given us by other historians and documents.

The more we study the question the more we become convinced that the Gospel story is indeed true.

Chapter V

THE CLAIMS MADE BY OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

WE have arrived at the conclusion that we possess genuine and trustworthy histories of the beginnings of Christianity. "We will now open them to ascertain who and what Jesus Christ professed to be, and who and what His disciples believed Him to be. The first thing that strikes any thoughtful reader of the Gospels is the marvellous self-assertion of Jesus Christ—the claims which He made on behalf of and with regard to *Himself*."¹ Prophets and teachers in former ages never ventured to claim anything for themselves—they always proclaimed themselves the servants of Almighty God. Their message was "Thus saith *the Lord*," "*The Lord* hath spoken," "Hear the word of *the*

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 140.

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Lord." " But the ' Prophet of Nazareth ' made *Himself* the centre of all His teaching, and the source of all the blessing which should flow to the world through His ministry. . . . To quote all the passages which bear on this subject would be to quote a large portion of the Gospels. Let a few suffice. The Sermon on the Mount concludes with the extraordinary assertion that Jesus would be the final Judge of those who heard His sayings : ' Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in Heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name ? and in Thy Name have cast out devils ? and in Thy Name done many wonderful works ? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you ; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.' Then there is another very solemn and remarkable passage in which Jesus not only claims to be the final Judge, but makes the action of men towards Himself the test of character : ' When the

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Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory : and before Him shall be gathered all nations. . . . Then shall the King say, . . . Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me. . . . Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me.'"¹

Among other things we find Him uttering such astonishing words as these :

“ Which of you convinceth Me of sin ? ”

“ I am the Light of the World.”

“ I am the Bread of Life.”

“ Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

“ He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood dwelleth in Me and I in him.”

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, pp. 140-141.

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“ I am the Resurrection and the Life.”

“ Before Abraham was I am.”

“ He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.”

“ I and My Father are One.”

“ Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess before My Father which is in heaven.”

“ Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

“ All authority is given unto Me in heaven and earth.”

“ Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.”

“ Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

There is no doubt that when our Lord made His Divine claims those who heard Him quite understood what His words meant. When He said to the Jews, “ Before Abraham was I am,” there was not the slightest doubt in their minds that He was claiming to be God, and they took up stones to cast at Him.

When He was taken before the high priest,

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the high priest solemnly said to Him, "I adjure Thee by the living God that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Our Lord answered, "Thou hast said : nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." How was this statement received ?

"Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy ; what further need have we of witnesses ? Behold now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye ? They answered and said, He is guilty of death."

We are so familiar with Our Lord's statements that we find it difficult to appreciate their real force and significance. If we could have been there in the Holy Land listening to Him, what an effect they would have made on us ! Here was this Man claiming to be Divine. Here was this Man declaring that He was the Ruler, the Redeemer, and the final Judge of the world ; declaring that nobody could get to God except by Him, that He came

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to give His life a ransom for many, that His blood was shed for the remission of sins. While every one else was to be judged according to what they had done and said, this Man tells His listeners that He Himself was to be the Judge of all, that He was coming in the clouds of heaven with thousands of angels !

Then He claimed equality and unity with God. Listen to what He says :

“ That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.”

“ Ye believe in God, believe also in Me.”

“ I and My Father are one.”

“ He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.”

“ I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world ; again I leave the world, and go to the Father.”

“ And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine Own Self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.”

“ If a man love Me, he will keep My words ; and My Father will love him, and

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We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him."

Can we imagine a merely *human* being making such statements as these?

"The question now arises: How shall we account for Christ's assertion of these mysterious and superhuman claims? Shall we suppose that He was a conscious deceiver? No writer, worthy of any consideration, will now venture to say that either Christ or the writers of the Gospels were consciously guilty of falsehood. How could Jesus of Nazareth, if conscious of deliberate fraud and hypocrisy from the beginning to the end of His life, not only profess but sustain a character extraordinary, apparently at least, for moral grandeur and purity, without a word or act or look that should betray its hollowness?"¹ And people of all kinds admit the exceeding beauty and holiness of our Lord's life. John Stuart Mill, a great philosopher of the nineteenth century, although he was not

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 143.

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what we call a believer, says that we cannot take a better rule for our life than this—"to endeavour so to live that Christ should approve our life."

Some people will tell us that these wonderful claims were not made by Christ, that He did not say these things, that the many tales of these strange words were added to the real life of our Lord. But, if we consider this argument, we shall find it falls to the ground. "The natural and the supernatural are so interwoven in the narratives of the Gospels that they cannot be separated."¹ "There is not the slightest trace in the Gospels, nor out of them, that Jesus looked upon Himself as a mere Rabbi or Teacher and nothing more."² Then we have the evidence of the Epistles written by St. Paul, *some of them within only about twenty-five years of our Lord's time*, and we find that in all he says about Christ he agrees with what is recorded in the Gospels. "In his first letter to the Church in Corinth we find

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 144.

² *Ibid.*, p. 145.

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that, according to St. Paul, Christ is 'The Lord of glory,' 'the Lord from heaven,' 'by Whom are all things.' In the same letter St. Paul summarises the gospel which he preached throughout the world thus : '*I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received,* how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.' In his second letter to the same Church, St. Paul says, 'We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.'"¹

We must remember that "the faith of the Son of God, which these letters represent, was the faith which St. Paul preached from the beginning of his ministry ; *and thus we are carried back to within three or five years of the death of Christ.*"²

So here we have One Whose life appeals to

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 146.

² *Ibid.*, p. 147.

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men of all classes, all nationalities, as the pattern life, and yet Who makes these astounding claims. There is no avoiding the *great dilemma* which presents itself. The purity and nobility of the character of Christ compel us to put absolute faith in all that He said. If we say we believe Christ to have been the pattern man, then we must admit that what Christ said of Himself must be true. "*Christus, si non Deus, non bonus*"—Christ, if He is not God, is *not* a *good* man. If men will not worship Jesus Christ, then they must despise Him. . . . This is the dilemma in which unbelievers in the Godhead of Jesus Christ find themselves. . . . There can be no possible doubt but that He lived a life of highest morality, of simple and faultless beauty. . . . What reason is there for assuming that the grandest and noblest of men was guilty of habitually asserting that which He knew to be false? What possibility is there of any man living a life of the highest and most stainless moral beauty, and yet being an inveterate blasphemer and impostor? . . . There is but one way of escape

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from the dilemma which we have stated. It is to regard the unquestioned holiness of Jesus Christ as the guarantee of the truthfulness of His Divine claims. It is to read His claims in the light of His life—in the light of what we positively know to be true of His character ; and to confess that when He claimed the attributes of God, He only spoke the truth—to confess that, in very deed, Jesus Christ is God.”¹

¹ Staley, *Natural Religion*, pp. 197-8.

Chapter VI

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AS PORTRAYED IN THE GOSPELS

* THE Gospels contain a certain portrait or character. We will endeavour to study this portrait to find out whether it is a fictitious character, or whether it has been drawn from a life. We take up the account of Christ in the New Testament just as we would any other ancient writing. We open the book, and discover in it four distinct biographies of a certain remarkable character called Jesus Christ. Two of the four biographies tell us that the birth of this Jesus was a miracle, and the others imply it. Of His childhood and early manhood they say but little. But that little gives us the impression of a child and youth of the purest excellence. In the history of the three years of His public ministry the

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writers of the Gospels rarely make any remark about Him, they rarely comment on what He said or did. They simply tell, or profess to tell, what He taught, what works He performed, what and how He suffered.¹ As we read the Gospels we cannot help being struck with the calmness and soberness with which they are written. The writers do not try to make a great character of Jesus, they do not point out how wonderful are His works, they do not argue that because He did these things He must be from God, they do not try to make people believe in Him; they simply tell us what He said and did, and leave us to draw our own conclusions.

They describe some one Who, while He claimed to be the Son of God and possessed of all power, never used that power for His *own* advantage; One Who led a life of wonderful unselfishness; One of the highest nobility of character. The pictures are taken from different points of view, but, in spite of these

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 152.

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different points of view, it is the same Face, the same Figure in them all. How then came these written portraits of our Lord's life into existence, if they were not taken from life ?

* The narratives in themselves are simple chronicles. There is no trace of genius in the writers. They do not strive to make an impression. But whenever Jesus opens His lips there come forth utterances, gleams of light, which captivate mankind, both learned and simple. There is nothing in the picture that is owing to the artistic skill of the painter : all its splendour appears to lie in its Subject.¹ Even those who have a prejudice against Christianity cannot help being impressed with this wonderful life. The writers of the Gospels simply let Jesus act and speak. * It does not seem that it occurred to them to consider how this or that action would appear to mankind, or what objection might be raised to them, but *they simply lay the facts before the world*, at no pains to think whether the world will believe

¹ Welsh, *In Relief of Doubt*, popular edition, p. 57.

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them or not.¹ Another point worth noticing is the candour displayed by the writers of the New Testament. They tell us about their own want of belief, the mistakes made by the Apostles, and so on ; and all of it in the most natural way. The Gospels have the ring of truth about them. They have no parallel in their contents in any books ever written.

Now what kind of impression do we get of the character portrayed in them ? * If there is one thing about which men are agreed, it is the beauty, the grandeur, the nobility, of this character. Some of the most eloquent things that have ever been said about it have been said by men who would not call themselves Christians. It has been well said² that "It is difficult to do justice to our intense love, reverence, and admiration for the character and teaching of Jesus ; we regard Him as the perfection of the spiritual character. . . . In reading His sayings, we are holding converse with the wisest, purest, noblest Being

¹ *Duchal*, pp. 97-8.

² By W. E. Greg.

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that ever clothed thought in the poor language of humanity. In studying His life, we feel that we are following the footsteps of the highest ideal yet presented to us on this earth." The student of the Gospels knows that there is no exaggeration in these sayings. Jesus Christ stands not merely above but apart from the most honoured men, even of Bible story.¹

"With a faith that never failed as did that of Abraham ; with a meekness that never failed as did that of Moses ; with a goodness that never failed as did that of David ; with a wisdom that never failed as did that of Solomon ; with a courage that never failed as did that of Elijah ; with a patience that never failed as did that of Job ; with a goodness that never failed as even Daniel was conscious that his did ; there was a harmony and completeness in His character which is found nowhere else. ' Meekness and majesty, firmness and gentleness, zeal and prudence—com-

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, pp. 153-4.

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posure and warmth, patience and sensibility, submission and dignity, sublime sanctity and tender sympathy, piety that rose to the loftiest devotion and benevolence that could stoop to the meanest sufferer, intense abhorrence of sin and profound compassion for the sinner '—all these are rays of the acknowledged glory of His character." ¹

We must always remember that our Lord did not live a life of seclusion and a life away from temptation, but that He was moving about * in daily conflict with the sins and sorrows of an evil world. He was brought into relation with every class and character, soldier and priest, lawyer and rabbi, prince and peasant, Pharisee and Sadducee, and so on. And yet, studied and scanned in all these relations, "the universal consent is"—in the words of Henry Rogers—that in our Lord "*there* is One Who is absolutely superior to circumstances, One for Whom His friends never had to make an apology, One in Whom

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, pp. 154-5.

the keenest-sighted of His enemies can find no fault, One, in short, Who, tried by the loftiest standards of spiritual excellence, must be pronounced, in the language of His disciple St. Peter, who had seen as much of Him as any man while He was on the earth, 'without blemish and without spot.'"¹

* St. Peter and the other Apostles believed our Lord to be *sinless*. The writers of the Gospels do not tell us He was sinless, but what they tell us forces us to this conclusion. Our Lord is shown as being able to see most clearly into the sinful condition of mankind. He insisted earnestly and constantly on inward purity of heart, as well as on outward purity of life. But with all this He was Himself not only unconscious of sin, but conscious of a purity which was pleasing, and always pleasing, to His Father.

He taught others to pray for forgiveness, but He never asked for forgiveness for Himself. There is one long prayer of His on record—in

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 155.

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the seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel—but there is not a breath of sorrow for sin in it from beginning to end ; on the contrary, it contains these words : “ I have glorified Thee on the earth. I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do.”¹

* With all of us human beings piety begins with repentance, and the most righteous of men feel most acutely their sinfulness. But Christ, in the character given Him, never acknowledges sin. He never regrets anything He has done, or been ; He never expresses the least sense of unworthiness. On the contrary, He boldly challenges His accusers in the question “ Which of you convinceth Me of sin ? ” and the challenge remains unanswered. “ We feel,” it has been said,² “ that in this one life remorse has no place. And this fact is so much the more remarkable and decisive, in proportion as Jesus was more humble than other men, and His conscience more sensitive than theirs.”³

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 156. ² By Godet.

³ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 157.

* Again, consider those last commands He gave. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Make disciples of "all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." "All the world,"—"All nations." The Nazarene carpenter, Who had never, so far as we know, travelled beyond the borders of His own land, a land which was quite insignificant in extent, speaks of all the world and all nations with all the calmness of a conscious right to rule over them. All the world, all nations, are to be brought under His rule by truth and by teaching. But marvellous as it appears, it is as natural as it is supernatural if we believe the Gospel story that He had now risen from the dead, and was about to ascend to the glory of heaven.

But it was not only after His resurrection that He had spoken thus. When He had not where to lay His head, He spoke of the world

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as the field in which He, the Son of Man, sowed His seed, and of Himself as the final Judge of all mankind.¹

* So the portrait drawn for us in the Gospels has these features definitely marked :

(1) The marvellous moral beauty of the life of Christ.

(2) The absolute sinlessness of Christ.

(3) The claim of Christ to be Divine—to be God.

(4) The claim of Christ to be King over all.²

* A noted man,³ who cannot be suspected of a bias in favour of Christianity, has said that it is quite impossible to imagine any one inventing such a character as that of our Lord.⁴ The idea that some ordinary Jews of the first century, belonging to a people far inferior in capacity for literature to the Greeks and Romans, could have conceived this wonderful perfect character—immeasurably above anything in Greek or Roman literature—this idea

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, pp. 158–9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 160.

³ Rousseau.

⁴ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, p. 160.

would be more difficult to believe than the mighty works recorded in the Gospels. Can we imagine a Jew of all people inventing a God such as the God of the Gospels? The Jews were looking forward to a great deliverer who was to turn out the Romans, and make the Jews a great people again. Yet the writers of the Gospels describe Christ as unpopular, poor, and the friend of the poor, outcast, and His life ending in a shameful death and apparent defeat.

* The character of Jesus as it is drawn for us in the Gospels is altogether unique—it stands absolutely alone in the history of the world. This is true even if we take into account only its marvellous purity and goodness. Let us place alongside the name of Jesus Christ any other names, the most honoured that can be found either in the Bible or other history—let it be the greatest of monarchs, the greatest of prophets, or the greatest of moralists. It is felt at once that Jesus must stand alone. He stands immeasurably above them all. And those who

Jesus Christ as Portrayed in the Gospels

are nearest to Him are the first to echo the words of John the Baptist when he said, "His shoes' latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

We can search history and the stories of all ages, and we shall search in vain for a man who through his life carried with him the consciousness of a perfect conformity to the will of God as the Gospels tell us Jesus did, and acting through life a part against which no charge of sin could ever be brought. In this respect Jesus again stands alone.¹

We can find nothing in the times in which Jesus lived which will account for that which distinguishes Him from all other men. Great men are the result of the age in which they live, but those who have studied those times tell us there was nothing in them which would account for so unique a Personality. Listen to what Napoleon Bonaparte (in St. Helena) once said: "Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne, and I myself founded great Empires. But

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, pp. 160--1.

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upon what did these creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for Him. I think I understand something of human nature; and I tell you, all these were men, and I am a man; none else is like Him: Jesus Christ was more than man. . . . He asks for the human heart; He will have it entirely to Himself, He demands it unconditionally; and forthwith His demand is granted. Wonderful! In defiance of time and space, the soul of man, with all its powers and faculties, becomes an annexation to the empire of Christ. . . . This is it which strikes me most; I have often thought of it. This it is which proves to me quite convincingly the Divinity of Jesus Christ."

* There is another consideration which renders it certain that the portrait of Christ in the Gospels is not an invention or a fiction of any kind, but a reality—the true portrait of a true person—and *that is, the unity of the four-fold biography*. It is not possible to suppose

Jesus Christ as Portrayed in the Gospels

any one having imagined such a life as that of Christ ; but that four people should more or less independently imagine and portray in writing the same character is still more inconceivable. Yet we find the same Christ, the same character portrayed by all four writers.

Let each of four men take one of the four Gospels and make it his special study, and then let them meet together to answer the question, "What think ye of Christ?" You would find that they would be of one mind. Each could tell the others much that would be new to them about what our Lord said and did. But each could say, The Christ of my Gospel was full of grace and truth ; most loving and most pure ; performing works which no other man ever did ; speaking with a wisdom which astonished priests and people ; claiming to be the Son of God ; dying on the Cross ; and on the third day rising from the dead, and appearing to His disciples who were to be His witnesses to the world. And then if they compared the books, they would find that

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each book would throw light the one upon the other, and upon the character of Him of Whom they wrote, and the comparison would only make it more certain that the writers were not inventors but actual recorders of one and the same history.¹

* Who could invent a life that would be a natural representation of so mysterious a person as a God-man? The task may well be pronounced impossible. *But we actually have such a life in the Gospels. And this is a fact that we must face; we cannot ignore it.* As we read this life we feel that it is the life of a true man, and yet we are not surprised when Jesus claims to be more than man.² We do not feel that anything He says or does is out of place, or could be better. The more we study it, the more we feel sure that this life is neither pretence nor fiction, but reality. It is easier to believe in Christ than to believe that His professed followers could be capable of invent-

¹ Kennedy, *Christian Evidences*, pp. 166-8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 171.

Jesus Christ as Portrayed in the Gospels

ing the story of His life. Can we imagine that these men who led such strict holy lives were deliberately preaching a lie, and, moreover, a lie for which they were ready to, and actually did, lay down their lives? The more we contemplate the story, the more we strengthen our conviction that the life is indeed a true one. We can account for it in no other way.

We will just notice how wonderfully the facts of our Lord's life fulfil the prophecies *which had been made many hundreds of years before*, and which we find throughout the Old Testament.

These prophecies had foretold:

His Divine and Human Nature. (Isaiah ix. 6.)

The time of His Coming. (Daniel ix. 24, Haggai ii. 6.)

The place of His Birth. (Micah v. 2.)

That He would be born of a Virgin. (Isaiah vii. 14.)

That a messenger would go before Him. (Malachi iii. 1.)

Jesus Christ as Portrayed in the Gospels

The miracles He would perform. (Isaiah xxxv. 5-6.)

His sufferings and death. (Isaiah liii.)

His Resurrection. (Psalm xvi.)

The sending of the Holy Spirit. (Joel ii. 28.)

After His Resurrection we find our Lord saying to the two disciples going to Emmaus, "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken ; ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory ? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself."

Then we might consider our Lord's prophecies. He told His Apostles that Jerusalem should be destroyed, and the temple overthrown, and we know that this did happen some thirty-six years after—exactly as He foretold it. Again, take His predictions of the effect that His life and death would have on mankind—how completely they have been

Jesus Christ as Portrayed in the Gospels

fulfilled. “ *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.*”

We have now seen :

(1) That the existence of Christ is a matter of history :

(2) That the existence of Christianity immediately after Christ lived is a matter of history :

(3) That many Christians in these very early times cheerfully suffered torture and death rather than give up belief in Christ :

(4) That the existence of Christianity cannot be explained if we leave out the Christ of the Gospels :

(5) That there is no trace of any other story accounting for Christianity :

(6) That the accounts in the Gospels and other books of the New Testament all portray the same Character :

(7) That it is impossible to consider the Gospels as a “ made-up ” story, (*a*) because, if so, the early Christians would not have received them, (*b*) because the Character portrayed is

Jesus Christ as Portrayed in the Gospels

so wonderfully beyond man's conception, and (c) because it is against common sense to suppose that the disciples who lived up to such a high standard of conduct would preach and be willing to die for a deliberate lie :

(8) That the references in the Gospels to the customs and conditions of the times are very accurate :

(9) That our Lord's life fulfils the prophecies of the Old Testament : and

(10) That the Gospels have the genuine ring of truth about them.

These are some of the reasons, very briefly stated, why we believe that the Gospel record is a true one. " The most searching examination to which the Gospels have lately been subjected has only resulted in establishing more firmly their truthfulness and trustworthiness as historical documents. No literature has ever been subjected to more vehement and hostile criticism, to more 'energetic, persevering, inventive, and unsparing attack' than the Gospels. And, in spite of this, or rather as the result of this,

Jesus Christ as Portrayed in the Gospels

their genuineness as historical records stands firmer to-day than ever." ¹

But we have one test of the truth of Christianity which can be seen, and made, by all of us, *now*. Our Lord's own words are, "If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." *We have this supreme test. Let us try Christianity on its own terms*, and we shall then realise the truth of Christ's own words, "Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

"The best Christian evidence is a Christian life. I believe you might present all these arguments which I have put before you as fairly as I can, and yet not convince people who did not believe; whereas, if by your own life you are proving that you who profess to be a Christian are really different to other people, by being so unselfish, so kind-hearted, so generous, so pure, so self-controlled, you would convince ten people by your life for

¹ Staley, *Natural Religion*, p. 187.

Jesus Christ as Portrayed in the Gospels

every one you would convince by your arguments. And, therefore, let us resolve, not only to come and listen to the arguments, but also to live such a Christian life that 'they may take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus.' " ¹

¹ Bishop of London, *Reasons for Faith*, pp. 45-6

Chapter VII

MIRACLES

IN previous chapters we have considered some of the reasons why Christians so firmly believe the story contained in the Gospels to be a true story. We have seen that the evidences of its truth are so many and so strong that the unprejudiced man feels almost compelled to accept the story as genuine. "Yes," he will say, "I quite agree that the evidences are so strong that I ought to believe in its being a true record, but these facts are so different from all other facts of history. What about the miracles recorded in this story—I find a great difficulty about them?"

To many people miracles are a stumbling-block. They say, "How can you expect us to believe such things as the miracles recorded

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in the New Testament ? ” They are quite ready to believe in the personal holiness and perfection of Jesus Christ, and in their lives to try to imitate His example, but they rather shy at the miracles. And yet we are compelled to believe in a miraculous Christ or in none at all : no distinction between the miraculous and non-miraculous in Christ’s life is possible. Christ Himself is a miracle ; His birth, His death, His resurrection, His ascension into heaven were all miraculous. It is well, therefore, for us to consider some of the objections people raise to miracles.

“ We may sum up the objections to miracles pretty completely under five heads :

- (1) That they are impossible.
- (2) That they are improbable.
- (3) That they are unnecessary.
- (4) That they are childish.
- (5) That they did not happen.

“ *Are miracles impossible?* Why do so many think they are impossible ? If you talk to them, you will find that they have a vague idea that they are contrary to the laws of

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nature. . . . To hear *some* people talk you would imagine that the laws of nature were arbitrary laws, which, so to speak, made themselves. The laws of nature are nothing more than this—the observed uniformities in nature ; the way in which nature, as we observe it, usually works.”¹ They are nothing more than the way in which it has been decreed by God that the machinery of nature shall normally act.

A point worthy of consideration is the extraordinary power of the will of man over external nature. We know that in obedience to the law of gravitation everything falls to the earth, and “yet every time we lift a weight off the ground we are counteracting the law of gravitation ; but nobody would say we were *breaking* this law.”² Remember, too, how man can gather the electricity and make it serve his purpose in the forms of light and force in a way which, if left to itself, it would not do. “And if puny man

¹ Bishop of London, *Reasons for Faith*, p. 47.

² Bishop of London, *Popular Objections to Christianity*, p. 8.

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is allowed this freedom of action, is it conceivable that the Almighty God should fetter His own free action, and should be unable, for some purpose of His own, to bring in a higher law which may seem to counteract or cut across for a time the usual method of His working?"¹ We cannot think such a thing for a moment.

The man who wrongly says that nothing can be known about God—the man we call an Agnostic—does not reject Christianity because of its miracles. He rejects it because, in his judgment (which we should call an incorrect judgment), the evidence is not sufficient.

"Professor Huxley, a great leader of science and an Agnostic, says, 'I have not the slightest objection to offer *a priori*' (that is, on grounds of reason) 'to all the propositions of the three Creeds. The mysteries of the Church are child's play compared with the mysteries of nature.'"² John Stuart Mill,

¹ Bishop of London, *Popular Objections to Christianity*, p. 8.

² Gore, *The Creed of the Christian*, p. 23.

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the great economist, who also was an Agnostic, says straight out, "If there is a God at all, of course it is absurd to say that miracles are impossible." Professor Huxley and others are entitled to their opinion on the question of the evidence for the miracles of the New Testament being sufficient or not, but in this matter (great men of science though they were) they speak with no greater authority than many other well-informed men. They are no greater authority than innumerable others of the past and of the present, men of the highest intellectual capacity, who have been convinced that the evidences of the truth of Christianity are irresistible.

Therefore when people say miracles are impossible, we can tell them that we ourselves, who believe in these miracles, are in very good company in this matter !

* *Are miracles probable?* The answer to this entirely depends upon the view we take as to the object of life. People say, "What is the object of all this? Why should we be alive here, at all? Whither is the great

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universe going? What is the use of the millions of worlds we see above us in the sky?" Of course, these questions cannot be anything like fully answered. But if we believe that God has put us in this world that we may build up characters after the likeness of God, that He has formed the world in order to produce people who shall some day share heaven with Him, that out of pure love He said, "Let there be light, let there be life," that He created children to share the happiness of His home with Him;—if that is the object of life, then miracles become probable, because, if they were of any use to modify the physical laws or to mould nature for a moral purpose, He would not let any material or physical difficulties stand in the way of working out the moral purpose on which He had set His heart. Therefore, the answer to our question is that miracles are probable, but we must also add, not probable to happen often.¹ If we accept the Bible as containing the account of God's dealings

¹ Bishop of London, *Reasons for Faith*, pp. 51-2.

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with mankind, we shall notice that * He is very sparing in His use of anything like the miraculous ; because it is quite clear that if God were to be constantly interfering with the natural order of things, it would be very bad for the characters of men ; all our calculations would be upset,¹ and we should probably rely on God performing miracles to save us from the consequences of our own foolish acts. * Therefore we should expect that these miracles would only occur at special times, when God wished to draw attention to some special revelation. And so if God wished to call attention to the words of His Incarnate Son, it was extremely probable that when He came into the world miracles would happen if they were of use for that purpose.²

* *Are miracles necessary?* Well, after all said and done, this is God's business, not ours. We cannot judge whether things are necessary or not in the great plans of God. But

¹ Bishop of London, *Reasons for Faith*, p. 53.

² *Ibid.*, p. 53,

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we *can* see this—that when the Son of God came to live in this world, His claims would be attested to by mighty signs, and we can see that the little body of people—the beginning of the Christian Church—required some strength at that early time which they would not require afterwards. When we put a little sapling in the ground, we often put a guard round it for a time to protect it, but when it becomes a big tree the guard is no longer needed, and we take it away. We can understand, therefore, that the assistance of miracles was necessary for the early Church at the start. When the Church became stronger in its growth and became firmly established, then we find that miracles ceased.¹ If Jesus Christ was what we believe Him to be, it has been well said it would have been a miracle if He had not been able to work miracles.

We may be quite ready to believe in the miracles of the Bible, but why do not miracles

¹ Bishop of London, *Reasons for Faith*, pp. 53-4.

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happen now ? The Old Testament tells us of miracles that formed part of God's revelation of Himself to His chosen people ; the New Testament tells us of our Lord's miracles, and that these powers were present in the infant Church. Why are they withheld now when apparently they are as much as ever necessary ?

Miracles seem to have been needed to assure men that behind nature there is a living Will overruling what appeared to them the unchangeable laws of the natural world surrounding them. They were required to assure men that there is a Supreme Being Who takes the utmost interest in their welfare, Who wants to teach and help them and to raise them to higher things. Thus were men convinced that there is Some One in Whom they could trust with an absolute and childlike confidence.

As we have already seen, Almighty God has only used these means with a special purpose in view. When this special purpose has been accomplished, then the signs have ceased.

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After all, if we believe that the claims of Jesus of Nazareth were most fully upheld by His miracles, then why should we desire more? Why should we, like the Jews, seek of our Lord a fresh sign?

But perhaps we argue to ourselves that miracles, if they occurred among Christians now, would produce a tremendous effect, that they would convince people and bring them to Christ. Is this so very likely? Our Lord worked miracles in abundance, and yet the great mass of the Jews refused to believe in Him.

Of course it may be that we have not sufficient faith. It may be that if there were in us the trusting, undoubting faith which the first Christians possessed, miracles might again be seen amongst us.

Are miracles childish? In the later times we find certain people writing down accounts of other miracles which they said were worked by our Lord, such as His making mud into birds, and making these mud birds live and fly. This and other like stories are instances of childish miracles invented from pure love

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of the marvellous, or very probably made up with the idea of selling to good but credulous people, who would be willing to buy anything which purported to tell them something more of their Saviour.

But when we turn to the New Testament, the authorised record of the Christian Church, we find nothing of this kind anywhere. * It is a most remarkable thing that the early opponents of Christianity never say that the miracles recorded in the New Testament did not happen. They ascribed them to magic, but they did not deny that they took place.¹

We must notice this about the New Testament miracles—they were worked for a moral purpose. "When lives were in danger, and an important lesson could be taught, then Christ could still the storm ; when some poor sufferer might be benefited both in body and soul, then Christ could open the eyes of the blind ; when the joy of family love might be restored to relations sorrowing for an irre-

¹ Bishop of London, *Reasons for Faith*, p. 55.

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parable loss, then Christ could raise the dead. He was no mere wonder-worker, displaying miraculous power at the mere whim of the moment, and for no conceivable good."¹ Take the case of the man with the palsy. Does our Lord heal him at once? No; He tells him first, "Thy sins are forgiven thee"; and then later on, after the dispute, says to the Jews, "But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power upon earth to forgive sins (He said unto the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house." This miracle was used to teach the great truth of the forgiveness of sins. We find that we cannot describe the miracles recorded in the New Testament as childish.

* *Did the miracles happen?* Of course, this is the main point. Every early account of Jesus Christ says He was a worker of miracles. Many of His most important discourses are hinged on to the miracles. Take, for instance,

¹ Griffinhoofe, *Helps towards Belief in the Christian Faith*, p. 157.

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the teaching about the Sabbath Day ; it is founded upon two miracles worked on the Sabbath. Or, take the teaching about the Bread of Life—"I am the Bread of Life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst"—it is founded upon the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. Some people have tried to take out the miracles from the Gospels, and the result is that the story becomes a mere mass of unintelligible fragments.¹

* Dr. Sanday, a few years ago, wrote a paper on Free Thinking for the working men in the East End of London. He says, "If I were arguing the question of miracles with an open-minded inquirer, I should advise him to be careful to start from absolutely unassailable ground." And he states that this ground is found in certain Epistles of St. Paul, acknowledged by all authorities to have been written within about twenty-five years after our Lord. "I should invite the inquirer to read

¹ Bishop of London, *Reasons for Faith*, p. 56.

carefully in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, the twelfth and fourteenth chapters, the description of a Christian community, and the extraordinary phenomena which habitually took place in it. St. Paul is not here proving anything. But he does assume throughout that there *were* manifestations—‘gifts of healing,’ ‘working of miracles,’ ‘prophecy,’ ‘discerning of spirits,’ ‘divers kinds of tongues,’ ‘interpretation of tongues.’ He takes these manifestations as a matter of course, though to us they seem extraordinary.”

Dr. Sanday goes on to say that “looking steadily at these two chapters, I say that I am absolutely certain that the facts referred to in them are real.”¹ St. Paul says that he himself worked miracles, and calls upon his opponents at Corinth to admit that he was an Apostle because he *had* worked these miracles.

We may notice the extremely simple and graphic way in which many of the miracles are described. There is every evidence that

¹ Bishop of London, *Reasons for Faith*, pp. 56-7.

they were written down by those who were present, by those who actually witnessed them. Our Lord's miracles were worked in public, as well as in private, before vast multitudes (*e.g.* the feeding of the five thousand), before all classes of people, and in the sight of his enemies as well as among friends.

Then we must remember the permanent character of many of the miracles. One man has been lame, another deaf, another blind, for a long time. Christ heals them, and there they were living for many years after, permanent witnesses to the wonderful power of our Lord. People, many of whom had known them during their afflictions, could ask them questions, and be told when it was, and Who it was had healed them.

Another thing which readers of the Bible cannot fail to notice is that in all previous Jewish history, whenever a miracle is recorded as having been worked, we find that the prophet through whom the miracle is wrought always calls upon God, and points to Him as the source of the miracle. But when we come

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to the Gospels we find that our Lord is described as performing these wonderful works in His own power—"Young man, *I* say unto thee Arise." He issues the words of command, and the marvellous deed is accomplished. This is only another evidence of the truth of the Gospel story, for surely a Jew would not have imagined such a thing as a man raising people from the dead by his own power, and not even calling upon God.

Then we are deliberately told that our Lord could *not* work miracles "because of their unbelief." Can we think that any one inventing the life of Christ would have made such a statement as that?

There is no doubt that from the very first the Christians preached about the miracles performed by Christ, and it would have been easy for those to whom they preached to have laughed at them and called them liars; but this they could not do, for the simple reason that everybody knew that these miracles (probably many hundreds in number) had been worked in the sight of a great many

people. There is no trace of our Lord's miracles being disputed by any one at the time ; in fact, even the opponents of Christianity did not deny them. We read of a well-known Christian, named Justin Martyr, writing to the Roman Emperor and the Senate an explanation in defence of the Christians. Justin Martyr had been a heathen philosopher, but had become a Christian in the year A.D. 133. In his letter he tells the Emperor and his councillors that they can verify the statements that Christ healed the lame, the dumb, the blind, cleansed the lepers, and raised the dead, by referring to the official records of Pontius Pilate.

How was it then that the Jews did not believe in our Lord ? They did not deny the miracles, but some even went so far as to ascribe His wonderful power to the devil. We must remember that the Jews for many hundreds of years had been looking forward to the coming of the Messiah—the Anointed One. But when He came in the Person of our Lord, He was so different to what they had

expected. They were ready to welcome a Messiah who would deliver them from the hated Roman rule, and give to the nation a greatness and splendour exceeding all it had possessed in former times. But against a Messiah Who came to establish a kingdom not of this world, Who asked from His people a meek and lowly heart, Who preached unselfish love and humility, Who pointed out the narrow way to heaven—against such a Messiah they hardened their hearts, and to Him they would not listen. “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.”

The greatest miracle of all was the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. It will be well for us to consider what evidence there is that the Resurrection did really take place.

“First, there is the existence of Sunday. A certain number of Jews, as a matter of historical fact, changed their sacred day from the seventh day of the week to the first. It takes a great deal to make a people change their sacred day at all. Why did they alter it to that day? Was it to commemorate the

death of their Master ? It would have been Friday, if it were. The reason was that on the first day of the week something happened which they thought was of infinitely greater importance than the death of their Master. . . .

" . . . Again, what happened to the Body of our Lord if He did not rise with it ? Only two sets of people can have had it, the Jews or the disciples. If the Jews had had it, they would have at once produced it to confound the story of the disciples. They would have said, ' Here is the body of the man you say has risen,' and the whole story would have collapsed. They did not ; therefore they had not got it. The disciples, on the other hand, if they had got it, and went about saying that He had risen, were terrible impostors. But there is not a single critic of the Gospels who says the disciples were impostors." ¹ They all say that the disciples really did believe that Christ had risen from the dead, and that they really did believe that they had seen and

¹ Bishop of London, *Reasons for Faith*, pp. 58-9.

talked with Him many times. " If, therefore, neither the disciples nor the Jews had the Body of our Lord, what can we think but that it was that same Body, glorified and transfigured, that convinced even Thomas, and was seen by five hundred people in broad daylight ? " ¹

One of the proofs of the Gospel story is the existence of the Christian Church. * With all its faults, it is without doubt the most powerful force in the world to-day. We find the disciples after the crucifixion going about in a disheartened, disappointed way, and yet a few days after we see these same men full of hope and joy and courage, preaching the good news of the Gospel all over the world. What started this wonderful train called the Christian Church ? Some engine, something great and adequate, must have started it ; and nothing great or adequate has been ever supposed, or suggested, except the Resurrection of Christ from the dead.²

¹ Bishop of London, *Reasons for Faith*, p. 60.

² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

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There was once a Frenchman who tried to get people to accept a kind of religion which he thought was an improvement on Christianity. He went to see a very famous man, and told him how disappointed he was that these new ideas did not make any headway. The famous man politely condoled with him, and said that he feared it really was a hard task to found a new religion, a very difficult thing indeed, and that he hardly knew what to advise. "Still," so he went on after a moment's reflection, "there is *one* plan which you might at least try : I should recommend you to be crucified, and to rise again the third day."

The Resurrection as an historical fact is true. "Dr. Arnold, the famous Headmaster of Rugby School, says, 'The evidence of our Lord's life and death and resurrection may be, and often has been, shown to be satisfactory ; it is good according to the common rules for distinguishing good evidence from bad. Thousands and thousands of persons have gone through it piece by piece, as care-

fully as ever judge summed up upon a most important cause. I have myself done it many times over, not to persuade others, but to satisfy myself. I have been used for many years to study the history of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them ; and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort to the understanding of a fair inquirer than the great sign which God has given us, that Christ died and rose again from the dead.'"¹ We know that the new religion spread very rapidly in Jerusalem, the very city where this great wonder had happened. Is it likely that the thousands of Jews of all classes, belonging to a nation which, we must remember, clung so tenaciously to their religion—is it likely that these men who had the fullest information, who were on the spot, would have accepted this fulfilment of their old Faith unless they were convinced that

¹ *Rugby Sermons on Christian Life*, p. 14, quoted in *The Natural Religion*, Staley, p. 223.

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the event which we know as the Resurrection did take place? There seems to me only one answer.

The little differences in the Gospel stories are really evidence of the truth of the accounts. If a number of persons were to describe some event that happened to-day, if they were true witnesses, their accounts of what happened would probably differ slightly. They would agree on the main facts, but little details would be different, because they had not viewed the occurrence from the same aspect, or under the same circumstances. People have put forward various theories to try and explain away the Resurrection, but if these theories are carefully examined it is found that they utterly collapse. There is only one solution, and that is that the Resurrection was indeed an actual fact. We have already seen how St. Paul testified to our Lord's Resurrection, and the fact that he and the other Apostles made the Resurrection the foundation of their preaching is conclusive proof of its truth. St. Paul says straight

out, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith also is vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ. . . . But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept." The Resurrection was the culminating miracle of our Lord's earthly life, and, if we believe this miracle, the others at once fall into line behind it.

"To sum up the question of miracles: It is the Christian belief that there is One God, Who is Almighty, the Maker and Ruler of the universe. To doubt His ability to vary the natural and ordinary course of things by supernatural and extraordinary events is to limit His Almighty power. A God Who is not superior to the universe and its laws is no God. 'A denial of the possibility of miracles is a denial of the possibility of God.' Thus to confess, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,' is to acknowledge God's power to do as He wills

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in the universe which He has made. If God is Almighty, nothing can be impossible to Him which does not contradict His moral nature. And the miracles recorded in Holy Scripture in no wise contradict His moral nature. On the contrary, they happened to secure great moral ends—the strengthening of faith, the punishment of iniquity, the awakening of repentance, and to serve high purposes in the redemption of mankind, and in the moral government of the world. . . . When we realise that the purpose of miracles is a moral purpose, we are prepared to believe that, by the will of God, nature in His hands can become the ready instrument to the fulfilment of such an end. To a mind which has right thoughts of God, there is nothing antecedently improbable in miracles. . . . For believers in God, the question is not, *Can* God work miracles? but *Has* He done so? And the latter question is to be answered by an appeal to history and evidence. The historical fact that miracles have happened is as well, if not better, attested than multitudes

of other facts in history, which are commonly accepted as true”¹

“ Let us not forget, too, that the miracles of Jesus Christ were works of mercy and beneficence. They were works which show that hunger and thirst, disease and death, sin and imperfection, are things temporal, which in God’s good time are destined to pass away.”²

“ The presence of the miraculous in the Gospel story is made clearer when the purpose of Christ’s coming on earth is remembered. Sin, so He taught, had ruined human happiness ; God was about to interfere and show the remedy. How should people know the remedy was from God unless it was supported by miracle ? Therefore it is that the miracles of the New Testament are what they are, and are so closely bound up with the teaching and work of Christ that they cannot be separated. Hand in hand with mighty miracles went teaching the most sublime and unworldly that men have ever known. We

¹ Staley, *Natural Religion*, pp. 333-5.

² *Ibid.*, p. 331.

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accept the miracles because they are part of the revelation of Christ ; we believe them because they are part of the life of that Divine Man Who impresses us with His perfection as none other can. To the spiritually minded the evidence for them is conclusive." ¹

¹ Griffinhoofe, *Helps towards Belief in the Christian Faith*, pp. 158-9.

Chapter VIII

THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

EXCEPT for the first eleven chapters, the whole of the Old Testament consists of the history, not of the human race, but mainly of one tribe, one people. Why is this? The Book of Genesis tells us that at the time of the Flood God gave mankind a fresh start. If they would now try to be good and obey Him, all would be well. But, alas, the story of the tower of Babel seems to show that they were again displeasing God. So we find that He selects a man named Abram, who was to be the father of a great nation, a religious nation, which would keep alive in the world the true knowledge of God. This nation was to be minded and blessed, and punished, and helped, and watched over, above all nations on earth. God made a special covenant or

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agreement with this race. The word "testament" means "a covenant," and the Old Testament is so called because it tells us about God's covenant with His chosen people.

This race formed, in a way other races and nations did not, the Congregation of the Lord. Almighty God entered into a covenant with Abraham in order that through him and his descendants He might bless and save others. He promised Abraham, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." "Now this covenant race, thus chosen to be set apart for God, to stand in the closest relations to Him, to be taught and trained by Him, was the 'Church' of God in that age. It was the Church *before* Christ, just as the Christian congregation forms the Church *after* Christ."¹ But the Christian Church, unlike the Church of the Old Covenant, was to be not for one nation only, but for all. We must notice that the Bible recognises no Church but God's Church. The Old Testament tells us in great

¹ Hammond, *The Christian Church*, p. 26.

detail how God worked in His Church among the children of Israel—the nation descended from Abraham.

Now let us see what the New Testament tells us about the “Church of Christ.” And, first of all, we must not expect to find in the New Testament any formal and precise picture of the Christian Church, and we must not think this strange. We shall understand why this is so when we remember that the Church was already in existence before the New Testament was written. But if we shall not find a complete detailed account, we shall certainly find quite sufficient for our instruction. We shall turn to the Gospels, and see what they tell us about God’s Church ; what our Lord said about a Church, what provision He made for a Church : then we shall turn to the Acts of the Apostles and read about the early years of the Church : and so on through the whole of the New Testament : and by that time we shall have found a complete answer to the question, “ What is Christ’s Church ? ”

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* What then does our Lord teach us on the subject of "the Church" by what He *did*? Well, He became a member of God's Church among the Jews; He was admitted into its membership when He was circumcised; He remained in it all through His life; He faithfully observed its ordinances and commands, though He protested against its abuses; He claimed for its ministers, wicked as they were, the obedience of His own disciples. In short, in every way He recognised and honoured the Church which in the persons of its chief priests and scribes at last compassed His death, and He required His followers to honour and obey this Church. Why was this? Just because this Jewish Church was the Church set up by God.¹

Our Lord did not commence His public ministry until He was thirty years old, and, as soon as He began to teach and show the wonderful signs of His Almighty power, great numbers of people accepted Him as their Master, their Teacher. They looked upon

¹ Hammond, *The Christian Church*, pp. 60-1.

Him as One who had been specially sent by God, One to whom God had given exceedingly great power. These people were called "disciples." This word "disciple" means a pupil, a scholar; so we may say that they were "pupils" learning from the great Prophet Whom God had sent to them. Sometimes these disciples did not like the teaching of their Master. When our Lord told them that His Body and Blood were to be their spiritual food, we read that "from that time many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him." Further, if we read the Gospels carefully, we shall notice that many of our Lord's discourses were addressed to His disciples as distinct from the multitude.

The message of John the Baptist was "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and our Lord, over and over again, talked about the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God. What does He tell us about this Kingdom? He tells us by the very words, "*the Kingdom of God*," "*the Kingdom of Heaven*," that it is God's institution. He

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pictures it as being made up of all kinds of people, bad as well as good. He tells us that it is to embrace the whole world. What steps did our Lord take about this Kingdom? We read that He formed a society. In the sixteenth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel we read, "When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that Thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father Which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." From this we see that *the foundation of the Church is the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*

“The new society was not designed to destroy the old, any more than the new teaching was to destroy the Law and the Prophets, any more than the New Testament contradicts the Old ; it was meant to ‘*fulfil it,*’ and by fulfilling to supersede it. It was God’s design that the Old Covenant Church should be *embraced by and absorbed into the new* and better communion of Christ. He designed not the destruction but the transformation of the Congregation of Israel.”¹ * If the Jews had accepted our Lord, the Congregation of the Law would simply have become the Church of the Gospel. As a matter of fact, the Jewish Christians, so far from renouncing either temple or synagogue, regarded themselves as the only *true* Jews. And Jews they remained until, by the destruction of Jerusalem, God made the exercise of the old religion impossible.²

The word “Church” comes from a Greek word which means “belonging to the Lord.”

¹ Hammond, *The Christian Church*, p. 109.

² *Ibid.*, p. 111.

So when we say in The Apostles' Creed, " I believe in the Holy Catholic Church," we mean that we believe in the Lord's people, we mean that *there is a society which our Lord started whilst here on earth to which we must belong, that there is a kingdom of which we must be the subjects.* What is a kingdom? It is a society of men living in an orderly manner under one head and ruler. The Kingdom of God *has* come. Nearly 1,900 years ago our Lord Jesus Christ established on this earth a visible society, a society still in our midst, which He called His Kingdom. Christ is the Head and King of this Kingdom. One of the ways in which He prepared for the foundation of the Kingdom was to choose twelve men from among His disciples—that they should be constantly with Him, and that He might train them for the great work of carrying on the Kingdom. He appointed these twelve Apostles as rulers and governors of His Kingdom. He appointed Holy Baptism as the one visible rite, the one visible means, by which alone persons can be admitted into His Kingdom.

He appointed the Holy Communion as the means whereby they must continue to sustain the spiritual life given in Baptism ; for besides teaching that His Church is to be a visible society, our Lord tells us that it is something much more than this. He tells us that its members are given an inward spiritual life. We could gather a number of people together, but they would not form a family unless God had already made them such by birth. And this inward spiritual life is given to us in our Baptism. The words that our Lord used to Nicodemus when talking about this new life were, " Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." We must always remember that the Church is made by God ; we do not make ourselves members of it. It is God Who makes us members. The Church is not a work of man.

After our Lord rose from the dead He appeared many times to His disciples, and we find that He gave this command to the Apostles : " Go ye therefore and teach all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ; teaching them to *observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you ;* and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Then we read of His saying to the Apostles, As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this He breathed on them, and saith unto them : Receive ye the Holy Ghost : whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." And in the first chapter of The Acts of the Apostles we are told that during the forty days between His Resurrection and Ascension He spoke of "the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." Now we are not told in detail what these things pertaining to the Kingdom of God were. The things which the Apostles were to teach all Christians to observe are not made out in a list for us. How then shall we find out what these commandments were ? We shall naturally turn to the book entitled "The Acts of the

Apostles." We can always be sure that whatever the Apostles established or practised was done either because Christ had told them to do so, or because the Holy Spirit had specially directed them; for we find that our Lord told His Apostles that they were not to begin their work at once, but were to wait at Jerusalem "until ye be endued with power from on high." He also told them, "*Ye shall receive power* after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." We remember also our Lord's words: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, Whom the Father will send in My Name, He shall teach you all things, and *bring all things to your remembrance* whatsoever I have said unto you"; and again: "When He the Spirit of truth is come, *He will guide you into all truth.*"

On the day of Pentecost, one of the great Jewish festivals, ten days after our Lord had ascended into heaven, God the Holy Spirit descended on the little band of disciples gathered together in Jerusalem. They, as their Master had promised, were endowed with

wonderful powers, and immediately began the work of preaching Jesus Christ. St. Peter in his great sermon reminded the multitudes how they had crucified One approved of God among them by miracles and wonders and signs, and then went on to declare unto them the Resurrection. The people could see before them the wonderful effect of the outpouring of God the Holy Spirit, and three thousand believed and were baptized that very day; or, as the Bible puts it, "there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

What did these newly made Christians do; what did they believe; what did it all mean to them? Well, we read, "And they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." The four points here set forth are the four marks by which baptized Christians in all ages may know whether they are living in that one true Church which Christ founded, and of which the Apostles were the first officers, the first rulers. What is the meaning of these four points?

They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine. This means that all the people who became Christians believed and held fast those things which the Apostles taught them concerning Christ and His Church. The doctrine taught by the Apostles has been handed down to us in the Apostles' Creed.

They continued in the Apostles' Fellowship. This means that they did not split up into a number of independent societies, but continued in that one Church over which the Apostles were the rulers and chief pastors. It is this mark of fellowship which is the distinguishing mark of the true Church now.

They continued in Breaking of Bread. By this is meant the Holy Communion, or, as it is also called, the Holy Eucharist. "The Breaking of Bread" was the name used for this service in the first years of the Church. So we see that these first Christians were constantly joining in the service of the Holy Communion—the one act of *public* worship ordained by Christ.

They continued in Prayers. This does not

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refer to the fact that they habitually prayed to God. You will find that in the Revised Version of the Bible the translation is given as "in *the* prayers," which shows that they met together for public worship, and that they used some appointed forms of service.

It is a most important matter that we should be able to tell whether we are members of the One Holy Catholic Church of Jesus Christ. And to do this we ought to be able to answer "Yes" to each of the following questions :

(1) Do we believe and hold to the Apostles' Creed ?

(2) Are we obedient to the Apostles' Government ?

(3) Do we receive the Holy Communion from the hands of the Ministry who have received their authority from Christ through the Apostles and their successors the Bishops ?

The Gospel was preached first at Jerusalem. Our Lord told His Apostles that they should receive power after the Holy Ghost had come

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upon them, and that they should be witnesses unto Him in Jerusalem and in all Judæa and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. This is why we find the Church called in the Creed the *Catholic* Church. The word "Catholic" means universal, for the Church is for *all* nations. It is thus a vast world-wide army. We are the soldiers. We enlisted at our baptism. We put on Christ. We took as our duty to fight manfully against the world, the flesh, and the devil. We fight under the banner of our Captain, our King, Jesus Christ. Our King is not visible to our eyes, but we have His own promise that He is with us always, that He guides His Church by the Holy Spirit.

* Now think of the Apostles at work—carrying out their Master's commands. Do they all stay in Jerusalem? No; after a time we find one goes to this country, another to that. Their great work was to convert men, to preach the gospel tidings that God had visited this earth, that He had offered to all men forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

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Their work was to enlist all men into the army of Jesus Christ. So we read of the Apostles at work—preaching, baptizing, confirming, setting up the Church wherever they went, conferring the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands.

“The Acts of the Apostles” tells us a great deal about the Apostle Paul and his labours. What a wonderful missionary was St. Paul! What an interesting story is the account of the journeys he made in Asia, Greece, Macedonia, and Italy! But what happened to St. Peter, St. Paul, St. James, and the rest of the Apostles? Most of them were put to death because they were Christians—St. Peter was crucified, St. Paul and St. James beheaded. Who then was to rule the Church? Let us see what the New Testament tells us.¹

We find two cases specially mentioned of the way in which the Apostles made provision for the rapidly spreading Church, a Church whose area soon covered some thousands of

¹ Watson, *Our Mother Church of England*, p. 66.

miles. There was the large city of Ephesus in Asia Minor—one of the most populous and important towns of those times. Many of the people had become Christians. St. Paul himself had taught at Ephesus for two years, and we read that he appointed Timothy to govern the Church there—in other words, to be its bishop. Then there was the case of Titus, whom St. Paul put over the Church in the Island of Crete. We must notice what their duties were—to set things in order, to “lay hands” on others, to ordain elders in every city, besides preaching, rebuking, exhorting, guiding and ruling the Church. * Thus, when the Apostles died, we find men in charge of the Church—men appointed by the Apostles themselves—ruling it, ordaining its ministers, just as the Apostles had done. The name “bishop” was not at first confined to men like Titus and Timothy. In the New Testament the priests are sometimes called “bishops,” or “overseers.” But it is of little importance what name is used. The important point is that there was this special order of men who

had received authority from our Lord to ordain others as bishops in their place, and to ordain men to be the priests of the Church.¹ After a very short time the word "bishop" was used only of this special order. A bishop does not become a bishop by anything he himself does. The King, Parliament, or any other civil authority cannot make a man a bishop. He can only become a bishop by being consecrated or ordained by other bishops, who in their turn have been consecrated by other bishops before them; and so on, right back to the Apostles. So we see the Church is from God. *We* cannot set up a Church. The government of the Church by bishops (Episcopacy, as it is called) is the centre of unity and of steadfastness. It is, as it were, the framework of the Church; it binds together the Church of all ages and lands.

The second order of the ministry consists of the priests. The word "priest" is a short word for presbyter, which word we find trans-

¹ Watson, *Our Mother Church of England*, p. 67.

lated in the New Testament as "elder." The priest is authorised to baptize, to teach, to administer the Holy Communion; but he cannot ordain any other man to be a priest, he cannot confirm any person. These things are reserved for the bishops alone.

The third order of the ministry consists of the deacons. Their work is to minister to the sick and poor, to preach and baptize, and to help the parish priest in many ways.

* We must not think of this three-fold ministry as a human invention. It is not a plan hit upon by some clever man. We have seen how Christ Himself appointed the Apostles, and we know that the Holy Spirit guided the Church in all these matters.¹ For the first 1,500 years of the Church's history the great mass of Christians throughout the world acknowledged no other government than that of bishops, priests, and deacons, ordained in direct succession in one long continuous line reaching right back to the Apostles, and so to Christ Himself.

¹ Watson, *Our Mother Church of England*, p. 66.

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Now it is very important that we should believe aright, because our belief forms and shapes our conduct. It is just here where the Church comes in. If we were left to pick and choose for ourselves, we should certainly make many mistakes. The word "heresy" means a "choosing." The Church has enshrined in the Creeds the doctrines which we are to believe. How did the Church when it spread through so many countries act as one body? It was done in this way. The bishops of the Church came from all parts of the world, and met from time to time in what are called General Councils. In these Councils the bishops reaffirmed those truths of the Faith which were being attacked by "heretics"—those who chose their own ideas. We may be quite sure that at these great Councils God the Holy Spirit guided the Church into all truth, as our Lord had promised.

Now to us in England it is necessary that we should know something about the history of the Church in our own country. We will therefore briefly consider its main facts,

and more especially the period and events known as "The Reformation." Unless we know these things in their general aspects, we cannot properly understand how it comes about that we have amongst us over two hundred different bodies of people all calling themselves Christians, and yet separated from the One Catholic Apostolic Church. Moreover, it is our duty to try to find out whether this state of affairs is right or wrong, whether it does not form a great stumbling-block to many people, and whether it is not directly opposed to that which Christ intended. You will remember how the night before He was crucified our Lord prayed to His Father thus: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for *them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.*"

No words could tell us more plainly, more appealingly, what a terrible evil are these divisions among the professed followers of

Christ. We cannot help seeing how very necessary, how extremely important it is, that we should know how it is there exists amongst us such a sad state of affairs—so clearly contrary to this prayer of our Divine Master.

We must find out when these bodies first broke away from the Church, why they broke away, why it is they still continue apart, whether their reason is a good one, and so on. By so doing we shall get a clearer idea of what it is our Lord intends His Church should be.

Chapter IX

THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND DOWN TO THE REFORMATION ¹

* “*The Church of England.*” How often we use this phrase, without a thought as to what the Church really is, how, or when, it came into existence. How often we fail to realise the position of the Church and its work amongst the people of England.¹ One cannot help being struck with the fact that a great number of people know little or nothing about the past history of the Church of which they are members. What is the result of this ignorance of the facts of the case? Why, just this. When, as so very often happens, they hear other people make incorrect statements

¹ The matter in this and the succeeding chapter is drawn almost entirely from *Our Mother Church of England* (Watson).

² Nye, *The Story of the Church of England*

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about the Church of England, they have got no reply to give—they cannot show them where they are wrong. So we will go right back to the time when Christ was first preached in England.

At the very time when St. Paul was a prisoner in Rome, and writing his letters to the Christian converts, the Roman armies had invaded Britain, and were engaged in conquering the country. Of course we all know that Julius Cæsar, the great Roman general, had landed in Britain about 100 years before this ; but beyond his beating the Britons in some battles, and receiving the submission of some of the tribes, nothing further had been done until the time of which we are speaking. This country of Britain consisted of great forests and marshes. The people, who were called Britons, were a rough, rugged people, split up into a number of tribes, with a chief at the head of each. They were a brave, warlike people, but could not, of course, stand against the highly advanced and trained soldiers of the Roman Empire.

What did these wild, ignorant people know about God? Very little. Their priests—the Druids, who were thought much of by the people (over whom they exercised great power)—used to teach them a “sort” of religion. They used to offer sacrifices, sometimes even burnt men alive. The Britons worshipped numbers of gods, although it is thought that the Druids themselves secretly believed in only one God. They used to worship in the open air, and regarded the oak as a sacred tree. So we see that Britain was a land in heathen darkness. We do not know when, or how, the Gospel was first brought to this country, but in all probability it was the Christians in Gaul (the country we now call France) who first proclaimed the glad news of “The Light of the World.”

The struggle between the Britons and the Romans lasted many years, and although, in the end, the Romans became masters of the country, some of the tribes were never really subdued. But we find that what the sword

of the Romans could not perform, was accomplished by the Cross of Christ, and that the people of Britain became subjects of the Kingdom of Christ. It is not easy for us to picture to our minds these Christians in Britain. Most of their churches would be not grand buildings like the Roman heathen temples, but probably humble timber buildings, with thatched or boarded roofs, the walls perhaps being made of mud. Of course they had their bishops and priests, just as the rest of the Church. It is said that there was a bishop of London as early as the year 180. The Roman historian Tertullian writes at the end of the second century: "Christ is preached among the barbarians. He reigns among people whom the Roman arms have never yet subdued, in the farthest extremities of Spain, and Gaul, *and Britain.*"

In the first 400 years of the Christian era terrible persecutions swept over the Church like destroying waves. Roman Emperors ordered Christians to be tortured and put to death. One of the most terrible of these perse-

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cutions flowed over the Church, including the Church in Britain, about the year A.D. 300. Even women and children were killed if they would not give up their Faith. It was at this time that St. Alban lived. St. Alban was a Roman soldier of noble birth. During the persecution he gave shelter to a Christian priest, and he was so impressed by the character of his guest, so struck with his goodness, that he asked to be told about Christ, was converted, and baptized. When the soldiers came he disguised himself in the clothes of the priest, and allowed him to escape. Alban was brought before the judge, who commanded him to sacrifice to the Roman gods. He refused, and acknowledging himself a Christian, was sentenced to be beheaded. The soldier appointed to execute him, struck with his calmness and bravery, threw down his sword, confessed that he too was a Christian, and in company with Alban earned the martyr's crown. A beautiful church was afterwards built on the spot, and is now a cathedral—St. Alban's Abbey. Of

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course St. Alban was only one among many who suffered for the Faith. We thus see that the ancient British Church had its martyrs like the Church in other lands.

It is interesting to know that three British bishops were present at a great meeting of the Church at Arles in France in the year 314, and that the Church in Britain was represented at later Councils.

We now come to a strange turn in the history of the Church in this country. The Roman Empire began to crumble to pieces, and the Romans had to withdraw their soldiers from Britain to defend themselves ; the country was therefore left to take care of itself. There was now no chief authority—nobody in command. Naturally, quarrels broke out among the various tribes, and, to make matters worse, the wild warlike tribes in that part of Britain which we now call Scotland began to overrun the country. The British chiefs decided to invite some people who were great fighters, and who lived on the other side of the North Sea, mainly in the country now

called Germany, to come over and assist them against their foes, and, in return for their help, they were allowed to settle in a certain part of the county of Kent. This worked very well for a few years; but more and more Saxons, and Angles, and Jutes (as these foreign tribes were called) came over, and eventually it ended in their fighting against the Britons, and overrunning the country. The result was that those British Christians who escaped the sword of the Saxons were gradually forced back to the western part of the country, and at last took refuge in the mountainous districts of Wales and Cornwall. The Christian churches were destroyed, for these Saxons were heathens, and hated the religion of Christ. "They worshipped many gods, the chief of whom they called Odin, or Woden. To these they built temples, and offered sacrifices. They believed in the immortality of the soul, and imagined the reward of the good—that is, those who had spent their lives in fighting bravely—to be an endless feasting and drink-

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ing in the great halls of 'Valhalla,' while cowards would be punished by being sent to a place of pain and darkness. Their chief feast-day fell in the winter, and was called Yule. The very names of our days of the week still bring these gods of the Angles and Saxons to our minds. The day of the Sun ; the Moon ; Tiw, the god of battles ; Woden, their chief deity ; Thor, the god of thunder ; Freya, the goddess of plenty ; and Satiré, the god of agriculture."¹

So this land became once again largely a heathen land. It was not likely that these heathen conquerors would have listened to the British Christians whom they had driven away. But one great missionary was sent to them from another quarter : his name was Augustine. How Augustine came to be sent on his mission to the English is a very interesting story. By some means or other a number of Saxon boys from Britain were taken to Rome to be sold as slaves. Stand-

¹ Francis, *A Story of the Church of England*, p. 43.

ing in the slave-market their fair faces and golden hair attracted the notice of a priest or deacon named Gregory. He asked from whence they came. He was told they were Angles. "They look like angels," he said. Gregory was sad to think these lads were heathens; and when he heard that the part of England from which they came was called Deira, he said they must be saved from the wrath of God (the two Latin words *de irâ* meaning "from the wrath"). So he himself determined to set off to this land as a missionary. Before, however, he could reach it, the Bishop of Rome died, and Gregory was made Bishop in his place. But he did not forget. He sent a band of forty monks, with a priest named Augustine at their head, to convert the Anglo-Saxons. They landed in Kent. Now the King of Kent had married a daughter of the King of Paris. She was a Christian, and permission was given to the missionaries to preach. We are told that the little band of missionaries came to the king in procession, one of them carrying aloft a silver

cross. As they walked they chanted a Litany entreating the Lord for their salvation. The king, who received them sitting under the spreading branches of an oak tree, bade his visitors sit down, and, by the assistance of an interpreter, Augustine "preached to them the Word of Life." When he had finished, the king gave Augustine permission to carry on his work, but would take no part in it himself. After much consideration however, the king became convinced and was baptized, and his example was followed by a large number of his followers. Augustine was consecrated Bishop of Canterbury.

Kent was, however, but a very small corner of England, and Augustine was anxious to carry the Gospel to other parts. So a priest was sent up to Northumbria. The king there also had married a Christian, and very soon he and many of his people became Christians. On the spot where he was baptized there now stands that most magnificent cathedral, York Minster. There is a beautiful story told about King Edwin. Before being bap-

tized he assembled his wise men and asked them what they thought of the new Faith. One of them answered, " I will tell you, O king, what methinks man's life is like. Sometimes when your hall is lit up for supper on a wild winter's evening, and warmed by a fire in the midst, a sparrow flies in by one door, takes shelter for a moment in the warmth, and then flies out again by another door, and is lost in the darkness. No one in the hall sees the bird before it enters, nor after it has gone, it is only seen whilst it hovers by the fire. Even so I ween is it as to this brief span of our life in this world. What has gone before it, what will come after it, of this we know nothing. If the strange teacher can tell us, by all means let him be heard." ¹

But Christianity was not destined to flourish in Northumbria, for very soon the whole country was laid waste by a neighbouring heathen king. A few years later, however, we find that the Gospel was firmly established

¹ Bright, *Early Church History*, p. 110.

there again by the Bishop Aidan. About the year 400 the story of the Gospel had been preached to the Irish by St. Patrick. It was received in a wonderfully enthusiastic way by the Irish people, and within a very short time Ireland became a Christian country. Many religious communities or monasteries were established there, and became famous throughout Europe for their holiness and learning. We find that the Irish Church was a great missionary Church, and accomplished a wonderful work among the Frankish conquerors of Eastern Gaul and elsewhere. Its missionaries, under the famous Columba, preached the Gospel in Scotland, and it was from this Scottish Church that Aidan came.

* The English, though a bold, courageous race, were like simple untaught children, waiting for some one whom they could trust to lead them into the better way. The Italian missionaries, rather cold and unsympathetic, though full of zeal, failed to touch their hearts. But the tireless tenderness, deep and wide sympathy of the Irish and Scottish preachers,

the love which understood and chose to share the lot of the poor, the weak, and the suffering, attracted the English; their love of Christ, their unselfish lives, their severity to wrongdoing, their deep and broad tenderness, took by storm the hearts of our forefathers.¹ In fact, the missionaries from the Irish or Celtic Church had a great deal more to do with the conversion of the English to Christianity than the Italian missionaries who had been sent by the Bishop of Rome.

England in those days was split up into a number of kingdoms—generally said to be seven. The people were not a learned people, and not highly advanced in civilisation. But even in these rough rude times many good men lived holy lives of prayer and quiet, and taught others the truth they loved. Up in the North at Jarrow there dwelt a very saintly old man named Bede, who spent all his time in study and writing, teaching and praying. Everybody loved him, especially his scholars.

¹ Spence, *The English Church*, p. 9.

When his last illness came he was translating St. John's Gospel into English. The boy who was writing at his dictation was weeping. "Write quickly," said the Venerable Bede, when the boy told him there was only one sentence more. "All is finished, dear master," said the boy. Then the old saint said the Doxology, and passed away. It is from the Venerable Bede's writings that we know so much about the Church in England in those days. We can imagine how the missionaries taught the people, how they helped to civilise them, how often they prevented them from going to war with each other. We can picture to ourselves the bishops living with their clergy in some convenient central place—perhaps a monastery. While some of the clergy stayed there and studied and prayed, others went out to the towns and villages, and preached to the people. We can imagine how the bishops would often go on long journeys through the country. And so the work of God went on in these seven kingdoms.

We must remember that though the Christian missions in all these kingdoms were working independently, they all taught the same Faith, had the same ministry, the same sacraments. There were, however, certain customs on which the Celtic missions differed from the Italian mission. For instance, they differed in their method of determining on which Sunday Easter should be kept, and consequently in some years they would be keeping Easter on different Sundays. But at last a meeting of the bishops was held at Whitby in the year 664, and the differences settled. It was agreed that instead of these separate missionary centres, all should be welded into one great united Anglo-Saxon Church under the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The country was divided into seventeen bishoprics, with the Archbishop at their head.

Spread all over the land were the religious houses—the monasteries. From these monasteries the priests went forth to preach and to teach, and we find that as time went

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on these missionary monks were put in charge of districts ; and it was in this way that the system of parish priests became established. The religious houses were centres of religious life ; but, in addition, they were the schools of the time, they were hospitals for the sick, places of rest for travellers, and the monks themselves did much practical work in reclaiming and cultivating the land, and so on. We must always remember that there were few books, fewer still who could read them, and there was much therefore for the priests to do in the way of preaching and teaching. Crosses were erected in churchyards and market-places, with scenes in our Lord's life carved on them. These were the people's books, and the missionary preachers would gather the people round, and teach them what the carvings meant. Quite a number of these crosses are still in existence.

It was not until 150 years after the time when the separate missions became one united Church of England that the English people were united under one king. We thus

see that there was a *Church* of England long before there was a *Kingdom* of England ; and it is interesting to reflect that it was the Church which, by its meetings, first taught the people how to make a Parliament. The Synods, or Councils, of the Church led the way to the Parliament of the nation.

* To this period of wonderful progress in Church life there came a startling and somewhat sudden close. The invasion of England by the Danes in the ninth century put a stop to all Christian and social progress in this country, and for a time threatened even the very existence of Christianity altogether. These Danes came from Scandinavia and the lands round the Baltic Sea. The knowledge that to the south lay vast countries, rich and prosperous, attracted this war-loving race to try their fortunes in these unknown lands. They would sail up the great rivers of Gaul and Germany, and plunder and murder the defenceless, terror-stricken inhabitants. They became bolder and bolder, and in the end it was no longer a series of plunder-raids, but

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an invasion by a host of conquerors who settled as they conquered. These Danish Sea-kings (Vikings as they were called) absolutely hated the religion of Jesus. The first object they destroyed in their fury was always the monastery or church. In Gaul a new supplication was added to the prayers of the people in the Church services: "From the wild rage of the Northmen, Good Lord deliver us." Ireland especially suffered. These sea-robbers first came to England in the year 787, but it was not till about sixty years after this date that any very serious attempt was made on England. Northumbria, the weakest part of the country, was laid waste. The monasteries, with their precious libraries, were destroyed, and the abbeys, churches, and schools burnt. It was some hundreds of years before this part of England recovered from the awful devastation.¹

Not only the North, but the whole country suffered most terribly. Peterborough, Ely,

¹ Spence, *The English Church*, pp. 26, *et seq.*

Winchester, London, Canterbury, Rochester, and many other places were pillaged, and the people massacred. Within a few years more than half of England was overrun and occupied by the Danes, and Christianity had almost vanished from the North, the Midlands, and the East of England. At last, in the year 878, Alfred the Great managed to inflict a great defeat on them, and was able to make terms with them. They were allowed to occupy half the country provided they became Christians, respected the property of the Church, and restored the lands they had taken from it. Their great leader and his nobles were baptized, and in course of time the Danes became absorbed in the rest of the English nation. For more than twenty years after his victorious campaign Alfred laboured incessantly at restoring England to something like its former condition, rebuilding churches and educating the people. The Church once more began to flourish in the land. Alfred provided books which his people could read, himself translating many into English, among

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them being Bede's *History of the Church* and portions of the Bible—the Psalms, Proverbs, and the Gospels. When we read of the wonderful work which Alfred did for the Church and for the nation, we see how rightly he is called “Alfred the *Great*.”

We can imagine the bishops of England meeting in council to talk over matters concerning the Church, with the Archbishop of Canterbury presiding at their head. Were the other bishops in subjection to the Archbishop? No. All bishops are equal. He simply acted, as it were, in the capacity of leader. There would be many hundreds of bishops in the Church all over the world: and we must now see how it came about that the bishop of one particular city claimed to be supreme over all the other bishops—claimed to be the monarch of the whole Church, and to rule the Church on earth in place of Christ. That bishop was the Bishop of Rome, or, as we generally call him, the “Pope” (the word “Pope” simply means “Father”). There had always been a Bishop of Rome from the times of the

Apostles, but it was not till many hundreds of years had passed that the Bishop of Rome made these claims; and even then these claims were only gradually made as the centuries rolled by. We can easily understand that when the Roman Empire became a Christian Empire, the Bishop of Rome (the capital of the Empire) would occupy a very important position among his fellow-bishops.

In the first centuries of Christianity we find that five of the chief bishops were called Patriarchs. There were four Patriarchs in the East—at Jersusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople; and one in the West—at Rome. Just before the year 600 the Patriarch of Constantinople wanted to be “Universal Bishop.” He thought that as there was an Emperor at Constantinople, he, as bishop there, ought to be a sort of Emperor in the Church. But the Church said this could not be allowed. And, as a matter of fact, the Pope, or Bishop of Rome, protested against this action of the Bishop of Constantinople. He said that no bishop ought to put himself

before all the rest and call himself " Universal Bishop." This Bishop of Rome who thus protested was none other than Gregory who sent Augustine to preach the Gospel to the English. And Gregory was right, because there is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that any one bishop was to be supreme ; and the idea itself was quite new. Yet the very thing which Gregory objected to was actually done by his successors.

In course of time the Bishops of Rome claimed to be supreme over all the others. How did they try to uphold this claim ? They said St. Peter was supreme over all the other Apostles—that they were all subject to him. Now, if this were so, we should expect to find some indication of it in the New Testament. We cannot find there anything of the sort. They said that St. Peter handed on the privilege of ruling the other bishops to the Bishop of Rome. They also pointed to ancient writers—to some letters and documents written in the early days, which spoke of St. Peter and the Bishops of Rome possessing this power.

Later on, however, it was discovered that these letters and documents had all been "made up," that they were forgeries ; but at the time they greatly helped to strengthen the idea of the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome.

Rome, it must be remembered, was a great city—the grandest city in the Old World ; and we cannot wonder, therefore, if its bishop were highly thought of : we are not surprised that bishops and Churches in far-off lands should ask advice of the Bishop of Rome. And this they often did. But it was quite a different matter for the Bishop of Rome to claim to be supreme over all the Church. This claim was only gradually made ; and it was not until about the year 1000 that the Bishop of Rome's pretensions reached their height. Then an ambitious Pope, Gregory VII, claimed to be universal monarch of the Church, with power even over the kings who ruled the nations. He said the kings should receive their crowns from him, and that he had power to depose them. Many kings and bishops yielded to him and his successors, and in England the

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Pope was often allowed to have his way. William the Conqueror (1066) gave the Pope much power over the English Church, but he himself refused to do homage to him.

Though Rome was the great centre of the Church in the West of Europe, the Christians in Greece and Asia would never allow the claims of the Bishop of Rome. This Eastern Church (to which the people of Russia also belong) still exists, with many millions of members, and does not to this day acknowledge the Bishop of Rome to be supreme bishop of the Church. And in England we find that the bishops, the king, and other brave men, often stood up valiantly for the liberty of the Church in this country. The English Parliament passed laws to restrain the Pope's power over the English Church. The Great Charter of English liberty—the Magna Charta, signed by King John in the year 1215—begins with these words: "The Church of England shall be free, and shall have her rights entire, and her liberties uninjured."

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The Pope claimed, and very often obtained, from the English Church large sums of money ; for instance, he used to claim the first year's income of any one who was appointed to a bishopric or to a benefice. Naturally the churchpeople in England did not see why they should be called upon to pay these heavy taxes. Another evil was that foreign priests, who did not even know our language, were appointed to our parishes. Sometimes they did not set foot in their parishes at all, but paid some other priest to do their work.

The state of the Church under the rule of the Popes was often very far from good. Even some of the Popes themselves in their own lives set a very bad example. No wonder that there existed great dissatisfaction with this condition of things.

Now suppose we have a cask of pure wine. There are two ways in which we may spoil it. We may mix it with water till there is hardly any flavour of wine left. Or we may put in all sorts of drugs to add to its

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colour, or strength, or flavour—adulterate it, spoil it. It is in just these two ways that men have dealt with the Christian religion. Some have taken the old Faith and watered it down—made it thin and poor, with no body or strength in it. Others have added strange notions and new doctrines—adulterated the Faith.

Suppose somebody should to-morrow start a new religion, a new sort of Christianity, should we listen to him, should we be prepared to join him? Not likely. We should at once ask such questions as these. Did St. Peter or St. Paul know anything of this new religion? Did the first Christians believe in it? Is there anything in the Bible about it? “No,” we should say, “we cannot join you, we shall keep to the old ways, we shall cling to the old Faith.”

Again, suppose somebody should ask us about our religion—what Faith we hold. We can refer him to the Creeds. They will tell him what we believe. We “hold the Catholic Faith,” we believe in the “Holy Catholic

Church." We belong to it. The three Creeds of the Church do not teach different Faiths: the longer Creeds only explain and make clear our Faith. But we must not add new doctrines to the Faith, which, as St. Jude tells us, "was *once* delivered unto the saints."

We have already seen how the Bishop of Rome tried to get all the Church under his dominion, how he set himself up to be supreme over all the other bishops. Was this part of the ancient system of Christianity? No! it was not part of the old religion. Again, in the course of time—not all at once, but bit by bit—many *new* doctrines and practices came into fashion, the Faith was added to, the "old" religion was adulterated, the "old" Faith corrupted.

Chapter X

THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND FROM THE REFORMATION DOWN TO THE PRESENT DAY

ABOUT 450 years ago a priest named John Wycliffe began to speak out about many abuses in the Church. At that time most of the books were written in Latin, all books were written by hand, and the majority of people could not read. But when Wycliffe began to write in English, his opinions soon became widely known to the people. He determined to translate the Bible into the English tongue. Of course parts had been translated into English long before Wycliffe's time: more than 600 years previously the Venerable Bede, and, a little later on, Alfred the Great, had made such translations. But for a long time there had been no complete translation of the whole of the Bible into the

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language of the country. It took Wycliffe, and those who helped him, ten months to prepare one copy, and to purchase it cost a sum equal to £40 of our money. Wycliffe's followers were called "Lollards." They mixed themselves up with politics, and for a time the movement was crushed out. Within sixty years of Wycliffe's death came one of the most important discoveries ever made—the invention of printing. This, of course, gave a tremendous impetus to learning, and people began to study and think about things for themselves. They began to know the Bible, and what the Church in the first centuries believed and did. They were not satisfied with the new ideas which had crept into the Church. Thus their minds grew prepared for a change, prepared for a movement to cleanse and purify the Church.

Let us consider some of the additions which had been made to the Faith and practice of the Church. Take the case of the Holy Communion. We remember that when our Lord instituted It in the upper room He gave the

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Cup containing the wine to the disciples, and said, " Drink ye all of it ; for this is My Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." So from the very beginning the members of the Church have received in the Holy Communion both the Bread and the Wine. But in the year 1415 the Church of Rome dared to set aside our Lord's command, and decreed that the laity (those who are not bishops, priests, or deacons) were not to partake of the Cup.

Again, Christians had always received the Holy Communion believing that our Lord was indeed present in that Sacrament. Then some one tried to explain *how* our Lord was present. Just as if any one could explain such a mystery ! Yet in the year 1215 (the year of Magna Charta) the Church of Rome made this explanation a matter of Faith—compelled men to accept this new doctrine. In the same way other doctrines and usages of which the first Christians had never heard crept into the Church.

In this brief survey of the history of the

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Church of England we now come to a sad time—only about 350 years ago. Those were very troubled days. It was a time of great disputes on religious matters all over Europe. The Church had sunk into a bad condition. It was therefore natural that earnest good men, who had the welfare of the Church very much at heart, wished and prayed for an alteration, an improvement, a reformation. The time during which these alterations were taking place in England is known as “The Reformation Period,” and the changes themselves are called “The Reformation.”

People hold many mistaken ideas about the Reformation.

Some people write and speak as if the Church of England *began* at this time. In this they make a very serious mistake. My face is dirty—I wash it. It is still the same face. So it was with the Church in this country. It simply *re-formed*, cleansed, purified, itself.

Then again, many people seem to be under the impression that the Church of Rome was turned out, and a Protestant Church set up

in its place. The reason why the Church of England is sometimes called "Protestant" is simply because it *protested* against the claims of the Bishop of Rome, and against the errors which had crept into the Church. But nobody at that time ever dreamt they were setting up a new Church : they did not think either of pulling down or of setting up. They thought simply of *putting things right*. The Church itself put things right that had been going wrong—the Church of England went back to the old paths.

Then some people say that the Church of England was set up by Henry VIII because of his quarrel with the Pope about his divorce from his wife. This again is not true. Henry VIII was not a good man, but his quarrel with the Pope only set the ball of the Reformation rolling more rapidly. Neither the King nor Parliament reformed the Church. The Church reformed itself. We have already seen how the Church in England had long groaned under the yoke of the Bishop of Rome ; long before Henry VIII's time it

had bitterly complained. Therefore, when the opportunity came, the Church in England declared itself independent of the Pope as it had been in the olden days.

The Reformation was not just one event happening in one particular year. It consisted of a number of events, spread over many years. We must remember that men's minds were at work about the Church, not only in this country, but also all over Europe. But, alas, in other countries many of the Reformers did away altogether with some of the "marks" of the Church. This was not so in England. The Church in England still possessed its properly ordained bishops, its priests, its deacons; it still followed the Apostles' doctrines; it still had its Sacraments.

As we have already seen, there was a time when the Bishop of Rome did not claim to be lord over the Church in this country. And at the Reformation, in the year 1534, the Convocations, or meetings, of the Bishops and clergy at York and Canterbury declared that

the Bishop of Rome had no more power in this country than any other foreign bishop.

When we find weeds growing in our garden, what do we do ? We set to work to pull them up. At the Reformation the Church in England pulled up certain weeds from its garden. It cut away from the Faith a number of errors which had been fastened on to it ; it did away with mistaken ideas and superstitious practices ; it returned to the pure Faith of the early Church.

Just as when we are uprooting the weeds in our garden, the garden itself will be a little trampled, will perhaps even show a certain amount of damage, so there was some damage done to the Church at the Reformation. For instance, King Henry VIII robbed the Church of a great deal of her possessions. He destroyed the great religious houses—the monasteries. The monasteries had done an immense work in the past. It was the monks who had converted the British Isles, France, and Germany ; it was the monks who had turned the wild forests and moors of Europe

into peaceful farm-lands. But during the 200 years before their destruction the monasteries had been growing less useful. There were still many learned and good men among the monks, but others had lost that zeal and earnestness which had been the characteristics of the monks of earlier times. What Henry VIII coveted, however, was the lands belonging to the monasteries: he wanted the wealth of the monasteries for himself and his courtiers. He took them without justice, and without pity; and the poor monks and nuns were turned out to starve or live as best they might. Only a small part of the plunder was spent for the good of the country: the greater part found its way into the pockets of the king and his courtiers, and the beautiful monastic buildings were allowed to fall into decay and ruin.

The Reformation extended over the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Queen Mary, and Queen Elizabeth. During this time there was much bitter persecution both by the Reformers and by the Roman Catholics, or Papists as

they are often called. We must remember, however, that these people were persecuted often not so much because of religious differences, but because they were considered traitors to the kingdom. In Mary's reign many were burnt at the stake on the spot where now stands Smithfield Market. In the reign of Elizabeth, the Pope sanctioned the invasion of England by Philip, King of Spain, and a determined attempt was made to capture England and bring back its people under the dominion of the Pope. We all know how bravely and successfully the great fleet of invading vessels known as the Spanish Armada was defeated by the English ships under Sir Francis Drake.

An important change was made at the Reformation in connection with the services of the Church. Up to that time the services had been said in Latin, and there had been, not one, but several books in use. The bishops had a book for their special services ; there was a separate book for Baptism and other occasional services. The book used for the

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Office or Service for Holy Communion was called the *Missal*. Then there was a book called the *Breviary*, which contained services for every day—Psalms, Lessons, and Prayers. But even the Holy Communion Service was not quite the same in every diocese. However, a good Bishop of Salisbury arranged his services so well that the Sarum (the old Latin name for Salisbury) Book of Prayers was used at the Holy Communion in many parts of the country. And, in making up our Prayer Book, great use was made of the services which had been said or sung in the past.

Another, and better, translation of the Bible was also made. It was called the "Great Bible," and was ordered to be set up in all the churches. In many a church the "Great Bible" was chained to its stand, and men used to go and read it, whilst others stood round listening. Our present English Bible is not quite the same as the "Great Bible." A still better translation was made about seventy years later (in the year 1611), in the reign

of James I, and this is the Bible we know so well—our “*Authorised Version*.” Yet another translation of the Bible was made about thirty years ago. It is called the “*Revised Version*,” and is very useful, for it helps us to understand better our ordinary Bible. It is interesting to know that the Psalms in the Prayer Book are taken from the “*Great Bible*.”

Again, in the earliest days of the Church we find Christians voluntarily confessing their sins in the presence, at first of their fellow Christians, and in later times in the presence of a priest only. In the Middle Ages this private, or auricular, confession, as it was called, was made compulsory upon all members of the Church. At the Reformation, the Church in England went back to the practice of the earlier times. It declares that if a person truly repents of his sins God will forgive him for the sake of our Saviour Jesus Christ alone, without confession to a priest or the pronouncement of absolution by him.

But often there is difficulty and doubt about

sin and repentance, and the Church in the Holy Communion Service addresses this exhortation to her members. After pointing out that the way in which to prepare ourselves for the Holy Communion is to examine our lives by the rule of God's commandments, to be sorry for our sins and confess them to Almighty God, to make restitution and satisfaction for wrongs done by us to others, and fully to determine to amend our lives, the exhortation goes on to say : " And because it is requisite that no man should come to the Holy Communion, but with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience ; therefore if there be any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned Minister of God's Word, and open his grief ; that by the ministry of God's holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness."

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A priest does not forgive sins in his own name, for only God can forgive sins, but he has authority to tell any one who has made a true and penitent confession of his sins to him as God's priest, that God has pardoned him.

Sin separates us from God, and if we find that we are being bound and fettered by sin, that it is holding us back from Him, then we must do all in our power to get free ; and our Lord has provided this means whereby we may be loosed from those bonds. This is the meaning of " Absolution "—the *loosing from* our sins. Thus the troubled soul is set at peace by receiving from God's minister the assurance of His forgiveness, together with spiritual counsel and advice.

Many people habitually or regularly make confession of their sins in the presence of a priest, but the decision on this matter the Church of England leaves to the individual soul.

The Church of England was not a new Church after the Reformation. It was the same Church as before. The parish priests

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(of whom there were about 8,000) nearly all remained at their posts. On the Continent many of the Reformers broke away altogether from the old Church. This was not so in England. The people of England did not leave the Church, and the Church in England did nothing to cut itself off from the rest of the Catholic Church, of which it still remained a true branch. It still had its properly ordained bishops, its priests, its deacons ; it still followed the Apostles' doctrine ; it still had its Sacraments. It simply rejected certain errors, and returned to the teaching and practice of the early Church.

We have already called to our mind our Lord's prayer for the unity of His Church, how He prayed that " they all may be one." He knew what terrible evils and weakness would result from a splitting-up of His Church. Remember also how St. Paul warns the Christians of Corinth against divisions. We often call the Church the family of God. Just as in a family there are sometimes quarrels between the different members of the family, and some

of the members are not on speaking terms with each other, so even in the Catholic Church there are divisions. Over 800 years ago we find the Bishop of Rome (the leader of the Christians in the West) on one side and the Bishop of Constantinople (the leader of the Christians in the East) on the other. For a long time differences had existed between the Bishops of Rome and Constantinople. The Bishops of Rome claimed to a superiority over the Bishops of Constantinople to which they had no right : the result was a grievous division in the family of God. There were faults on both sides, but the great blame for this division must be laid on the shoulders of the Bishops of Rome. The Church divided into the Eastern (or Greek) Church, and the Western (or Roman) Church, sometimes called the Latin Church. These two branches of the Church have never since been friends. Yet they are both part of the same great society which our Lord founded—they have the same ministry, the same Sacraments, and, in the main, the same Faith.

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We have already seen how the Church in England became (as she had been in the past), independent of the Bishop of Rome. Thus at the present time there are three great branches of the Catholic Church—the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church, and the English or Anglo-Catholic Church.

Very earnestly ought we to pray that the differences between these three parts of God's family may be smoothed away.

We pray in the Litany that God will keep us from all heresy and *schism*. What is schism? Schism is wilful separation from the Catholic Church—the cutting ourselves off from Christ's Great Society.

At the time of the Reformation some people thought that the Church had not gone far enough in reforming herself. In thinking thus they were influenced by the Reformers on the Continent, whose example they would have liked the English Church to follow. These people were called "Puritans." In Queen Elizabeth's reign some of the Puritans left the Church and set up congregations of

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their own—they cut themselves off from Christ's Society.

For instance, in the year 1568 a man named Robert Brown set up a new religion in this country. He did not believe in regarding the Church as a great society which, with its bishops, priests, and deacons, had come down from the Apostles' times—from the day when the Holy Ghost was poured forth on the Church. This man, Robert Brown, held the view that any number of men may band together, may settle just what they will believe, may choose their own minister, and call themselves a "church," and also that each congregation was independent of every other. Those people who thought and acted in this way were called "Independents," and for many years the "Independents" were the bitter foes of the Church of England. Many people at the present day think as the Independents did. They now call themselves "Congregationalists."

In the year 1633 we find another society started. Certain of the Independents adopted

some of the ideas of a strange religious sect on the Continent. They said that infants and little children ought not to be baptized, but only grown-up people, and that at Baptism it was not sufficient to pour the water on the person's forehead, but that he must be immersed in the water. So they separated from the Independents and formed a new sect. They called themselves "Baptists," and since then the Baptists have themselves split up into a number of bodies.

Then there were the Quakers, founded in the year 1646, and the Presbyterians, who started about the year 1590. The Presbyterians do not hold the views of the Catholic Church regarding bishops. To this body belong the majority of the people in Scotland.

The people who belong to these and the many other bodies which have sprung up since are called "Nonconformists," because they do not *conform* to the Church of England. They are also called "Dissenters," because they *dissent* from, or disagree with, the Church of England.

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This sin of schism has grown and grown, so that at the present day there are in this country over two hundred different societies of people, each professing belief in Christ, yet living apart from the one true Church.

The idea of forming Churches was quite a new idea. For 1,500 years, right from the times of the Apostles, the Church had had its bishops, priests, and deacons. Is it likely that it was wrong all the world over till Robert Brown came to set it right? We do not find in the history of the Church any part of the Church existing without bishops, priests, and deacons, drawing their authority from our Lord.

It is indeed sad to see the unity of the followers of Christ broken up in this way. How greatly these divisions hinder the work of the salvation of men! What must the Indians, or the Japanese, or the Chinese, think of it all? Can we wonder that Christianity is not making in their countries the progress we should expect? They hear one body called by this name, another by that,

some by the name of their founders ; they see a variety of systems, different ways, different beliefs. No wonder that many are puzzled and hold aloof from Christianity.

There is a story told by Bishop Selwyn about fifty years ago. He was talking to a chief in New Zealand. The chief said to him, " It is like this with the religion of the Christians. I am, as it were, sitting at the cross-roads. Some say, ' Go this way.' Some say, ' Go that.' I am perplexed. I cannot understand." The poor chief remained so till he died.

How then are we to decide ? What is the standard to which we shall refer ? These new religions say, " We have just found out the real truth, follow us." What does the Church of England say ? She refers us to the Faith of the first Christians—to the Faith once delivered to the saints, the Faith which the Apostles held. The Church in England refuses all new doctrines, whether put forth by the Church of Rome or by those bodies outside the Church. She refuses all new systems

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—in fact, anything that is not part of the old Faith. It is quite clear that our Lord founded a society to which we must all belong, a society whose ministers have received their authority direct from Him, and through whom He dispenses to men the means of grace in the Sacraments. No matter what happens, we must not cut ourselves off or leave that society. God has appointed a way for our salvation. Shall we be so presumptuous as to tell God that we know better than He? The Church of England takes her stand upon the Word of God. Some one may say, “ But do not men explain the Bible in different ways ; do not men have different ideas of what the Bible means ? How about this ? ” Well, the Church appeals to the ancient Christian writers, the men of the first centuries—we call them the Christian Fathers. She appeals to the meaning of the Bible as understood by the Christians of the first ages of the Church. She appeals to the Creeds, and to the great Councils at which bishops from all parts of the world met to decide any disputed points.

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The Church is like a great high-road. Millions of Christians have travelled along it. Since Christ came it has been the high-road for travellers towards the heavenly home. We will not waste our time in trying to find a new way for ourselves ; we will keep to Christ's way.

So the Church of England keeps to the old paths. She tries to keep clear of error, from whatever quarter it comes ; she endeavours to bring up her children in the pure Faith of the Catholic Church. In what spirit then shall we look upon those who belong to these other societies ? We must not speak harshly or bitterly of them. They do not realise that these schisms are doing great harm to the Faith of Christ. Very often they do not know the facts. And we do know that they are endeavouring to follow their Master, and that often their lives put to shame some of us who belong to the Catholic Church. But no good ever comes of giving up true principles. We must therefore stick to God's ancient Church and her ways, praying

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that in His good time we may all be *one* again.

We have already seen how strange doctrines had been brought by the reformers from abroad, how some men had even set up new religions, separate societies, with strange or incomplete beliefs. Besides differing on very important points, these men hated the Church ways—they were always ridiculing them. They wanted to do away with many good practices, such as the sign of the Cross in Baptism, the use of the ring in marriage, bowing at the Name of Jesus, the wearing of a surplice by the priest, and so on.

Added to these disputes, and very closely concerned with them, there were troublous times too for the State. The country was plunged into a long Civil War which ended in the King—Charles I—being beheaded by his enemies. The country was then ruled by Oliver Cromwell and his soldiers, who were mainly Independents : everything was in the utmost confusion. The Church of England was most bitterly persecuted ; the parish

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priests were turned out of their livings ; Presbyterians and Independent ministers were put in their places. The Prayer Book was not allowed to be used ; all copies had to be given up ; people were fined and imprisoned for using it. After fourteen years, however, this trouble came to an end by the death of Oliver Cromwell and the restoration of King Charles's son to the throne. Those clergy who were still alive were restored to their livings. The Presbyterian and Independent ministers who had been put in the place of the parish priests were treated with great consideration, and those who agreed to be ordained by a bishop and to use the Prayer Book were allowed to remain. So the Church went on with its work as before. Twenty-five years later an effort was made under James II to bring England back under the rule of the Pope. But the people would not hear of it.

This brings us down to the eighteenth century—a century during which the spirit of unbelief spread over the country. The troubled times of the previous hundred years,

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the Civil War, perhaps the reaction against the severity and harshness of the Puritans, the unbelief on the Continent, and other causes, all combined to destroy in a great measure the religious life of the nation.

The condition of the poorer classes was very bad. There were no schools. Children were often allowed to grow up in ignorance—many could not even read. The games and pastimes of the country were low and brutal. There was much vice and crime, much wickedness and misery. Drunkenness was very prevalent among the upper classes. What was the Church doing? It seemed to be asleep, it became very worldly, and things were much neglected. About this time (1717), a great injustice was done to the Church. It was the custom for the bishops and clergy to meet to talk over and settle the affairs of the Church (this meeting is called "Convocation"). But because the clergy stood up boldly against the false doctrine of one of the bishops, the Government would not allow Convocation to assemble, and it did not meet again for 130

years. The parish churches in those days were nearly all locked up six days in the week, the buildings themselves were often neglected and dirty, filled with high wooden pews for the well-to-do people—little provision made for the poor. They were often spoilt by being white-washed, and in other ways disfigured. There were, of course, many bishops and priests, even in these bad times, who did what they could to keep their people in the good old ways and faithful to the Church. But the Church and the people badly needed rousing; the religious life of the nation seemed to be very slack, very low.

It was no good merely to sit down and lament over this state of affairs. Something had to be done. About this time a number of earnest young men at Oxford University often used to meet to discuss this unsatisfactory state of affairs: and they not only talked, they did something better—they prayed about it. Of course they were ridiculed and laughed at by the careless godless young men among whom they lived, who spoke of them as

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the "Holy Club," and nicknamed them "Methodists," because they laid down for themselves a rule of life—they had a certain *method*, or way, of living. They made a rule to observe the Feasts and Fasts of the Church, to go to the Holy Communion every Sunday and Holy Day, to deny themselves, to give alms regularly—in fact, to *keep the good old rules of the Church*. Among this band of young men were two brothers named John and Charles Wesley, sons of a parish priest in Lincolnshire. They became priests themselves; they stuck manfully to their determination to do something to bring this careless country back to God. Others joined them, and they started to work. In the large towns were vast masses of ignorant careless men, and these they preached to and visited. We read of their preaching to thousands of colliers in the open air. They spoke to them very simply, very earnestly. Their preaching did a wonderful amount of good, rousing many a poor sinner from his wicked ways and starting him on a better life.

This great movement woke up the Church generally ; its great leader was John Wesley. All over the country he went about stirring up people to realise their sins and their need of a Saviour. " Wesley always meant the society which he founded to be the friend, not the opponent, of the Church. He had no desire to draw away one single member from the Church. On the contrary, it was one of his first and strictest rules that his followers should never hold a prayer-meeting at the same time that service was going on in the parish church, and that they should always go there to receive the Sacrament. He desired his followers to form an inner circle of devout people within the Church, who were to meet together at stated times for mutual instruction and prayer, and strive to bring back the wandering and lost into the fold of Christ. But soon he found some difficulty in keeping his followers within bounds. He had organised a band of lay preachers, and they ran into wild excesses in their teaching, and the people neglected his strict rules of keeping to

the services of their parish church." ¹ When some of these lay preachers wanted to baptize and to administer the Holy Communion, John Wesley told them they could on no account do so, because they were not priests. But after Wesley's death, though he had earnestly warned them against it, though only a short time before his death in 1791 he had implored them never to leave the Church and set up a society of their own, the Methodists separated themselves from the Church! Thus, alas, was started another society—the Wesleyans. John Wesley himself was not always wise, and sometimes did weak and foolish things, but he and those who helped him accomplished a wonderful work in reviving the religious life in England.

* In the latter half of the eighteenth century, and in the early years of the nineteenth century, what is called the Evangelical Revival did a great work in the Church, the result being a great increase of personal

¹ Francis, *A Story of the Church of England*, pp. 307 *et seq.*

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holiness both in the clergy and in the laity. The Evangelicals laid much stress on the sinfulness of man by nature, his utter want of power to do anything good of himself, the Atonement made by Christ on the Cross for the sins of the world, the work of the Holy Spirit in producing personal holiness in the heart of the believer.¹ But there were other most important parts of the Faith which they rather neglected. And so by the grace of God came another revival in the Church, which opened men's eyes to those truths which had become somewhat forgotten and obscured.

About eighty years ago a few priests at Oxford and elsewhere began to show people what a great thing it is to belong to the Catholic Church. People did not value the Sacraments enough—they did not value them as the first Christians had done. They did not realise as much as they might that the Church of England was but a *part* of the

¹ Francis, *A Story of the Church of England*, pp. 319–20.

Catholic Church. They did not realise what a great and solemn thing it is to worship God. This movement was known as the Oxford Movement, or the High Church Movement. A number of changes were made in ceremonial in a great many of our churches. At first this aroused a great outcry, but gradually the difficulties were overcome.

As a result of the Oxford Movement our churches are now more beautiful, our services performed with proper reverence and more impressive dignity ; above all, the Sacraments are more highly treasured, and people are realising what they mean when they say in the Nicene Creed, " I believe one Catholic and Apostolic Church."

To conclude our brief survey of the history of the Church in England. We have seen how, from the earliest days, the Church in this country has had her ups and downs—sometimes in trouble and difficulty, sometimes in danger and anxiety, sometimes weak through

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disputes and strifes, sometimes in smooth water, peaceable, and flourishing.

We have seen that it is part of the same Society which was started by our Lord, and which reached this country about 1,800 years ago. We have seen how the Church and the nation grew side by side, and that no new Church was set up at the time of the Reformation. We have seen how from one reason or another some have separated from the great Society, and have started fresh societies of their own. We have seen how the Church has had her times of weakness, of sleep, and of neglect. We have seen how she has been revived from time to time, so that at the present day the Church in England is a living part of the Catholic Church, full of vigour and zeal for Christ her Master.

Surely we ought to love this grand old Church of England—the Church into which we have been baptized, the Church which has taught us to know God, the Church through whose ministers our Lord gives us in the

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Sacraments food for our souls. And if we love our Church, we shall take pains to understand the ways of the Church, the history of the Church, because, after all, many people remain separated from Christ's Society just because they do not know these things. Above all, we must, as our Lord has told us, "Let our light so shine before men." This is what every good Churchman should do. By our lives we must let others see what it is to be a member of the Catholic Church.

Chapter XI

CONCLUSIONS

WE will now try to gather up the threads of the preceding chapters, and see just what it all means. . Necessarily, many points have been dealt with but briefly. A great deal could be said upon each one of the arguments which have been presented. Our aim has been to see the matter as a whole, to set clearly before ourselves the main facts, and to view them in their true perspective. We have been chiefly concerned with the direct revelation which God has given of Himself to us human beings, and with all that has happened since as the result.

In all ages men have speculated about God : they have tried to fathom the mystery of things in general. Philosophers in all times have thought and taught and written about

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these matters. Some of them have had great and beautiful ideas of God, and have practised and preached a high and noble standard of life. The Holy Spirit has *always* been working among men. *All* goodness, wherever we find it, is His work; and it was the Holy Spirit Who guided and enlightened these philosophers and teachers. It is He Who speaks to all of us through our conscience. It does not matter what we think about our conscience, of how it is we have a conscience. The fact remains that we do possess—some of us more and some less—this sense of right and wrong. We know that there are some things we ought not to do, that there are other things we ought to do. We know that every time we refuse to obey our conscience we are deliberately going against what we feel to be an Absolute Authority.

Directly we realise that some actions are good and others evil, there is set up plainly before us a standard of conduct. If we want a starting-point for every man, woman, and child, in this world, here we have it. If we

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follow the light that is in us (that light is the work of the Holy Spirit), we may be very certain that we shall be led to a fuller and ever fuller knowledge of God. But only those who seek God can expect to know Him. Our Lord's words are, "*Seek* and ye shall find." It may be that for some people the search will be a long one; but we may be quite certain that, if they are real seekers, they will in the end find God. Again, take the case of a man whose search has been partly successful. He believes in a Good God. He feels that surely this Good God would tell us something about Himself, but yet he finds it hard to believe fully in Jesus Christ. What is he to do? Well, he must just go on seeking, asking God to guide him to the Light. He will get there.

When we Christians come to consider *what* it is that God has directly revealed about Himself, we are sometimes inclined to grumble because He has not told us more. There are many things we cannot understand. We should like to know more about the existence and origin of evil, more about the spirits—

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good and evil—how it was that the evil spirits fell from being angels of light, more about the existence of pain and the beginning and fall of man. We find it hard to understand why God permits certain things to be, and why He has not made things easier for us. But because we know only in part now, because we see as “through a glass darkly,” is no reason why we should refuse that which we *can* know and take hold of.

We have been examining the grounds for our belief in that most astounding, most tremendous fact in the history of the world—that God Himself has taken human form, has Himself become man. When we *really* think, and *really* try to grasp this one fact, we are filled with deepest wonder and amazement. “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.” This being so, all our difficulties vanish. If God

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has been *amongst* us, there need be no more searchings to find out what He is like, what is the meaning of all things. We can but humbly listen to His words and strive to follow His commands. No more need is there for us to seek for some philosophy, some system, which seems more or less to explain the why and wherefore of things. For us, all this is past. It may be very interesting and very useful to know how men in bygone times have striven after the knowledge of God ; but now we know that He *has* revealed Himself so fully, these questions for us do not exist. We shall say to ourselves, " I believe Jesus Christ is God ; that is enough for me. If He did not see fit when on this earth to enlighten mankind about these problems and perplexities, who am I that I should dare to take Him to task ? " You will remember that on one occasion some one said to our Lord, " Lord, are there few that be saved ? " The answer given was an exhortation to effort : " Strive to enter in at the strait gate " ; and a warning : " Behold, there are last which shall be first, and there

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are first which shall be last." It was as if our Lord said, 'You know what your duty is: strive hard to do it; you are not concerned with these other matters.' God has revealed enough for us to fulfil all that He purposes for us; that is sufficient.

Then, again, concerning things we cannot understand; it is enough that He has told us of them. We cannot understand very much about the mystery of the Atonement, but our Lord told us that His blood was shed for the remission—the taking away, the blotting out—of sins, that our sins might be forgiven. We do find it so hard to realise what a terrible thing sin is in the eyes of the All-Holy God. We find it especially hard in these days, when people are inclined to think much about the *love* of God towards us, and to rely on that, but are apt to forget about the *justice* of God. We try to get to heaven with not too much trouble. We forget that God has made us for Himself, and that the only real life for each one of us is at all times to do His will, whatever the cost may be.

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Why did God the Son come into this world? He tells us in the plainest language : “ I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” This life of which our Lord speaks is something *we may begin to have here in this world*. How little we can realise the glorious possibilities of this life in the world to come ! “ Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” Do let us get hold of the fundamental facts : God is. God made me. God loves me. I may know and love God. God has lived on this earth as a man. God offers me Everlasting Life. Am I accepting His gift, or am I casting it from me ?

How are we to obtain this great gift? What are the conditions attached? Again we will find the answers in our Lord's own words.

It has its beginning.

“ *Except* a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

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It is sustained by the Author of Life.

“ *Except* ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.”

It demands of us Conversion—a continual turning to God our Father.

“ *Except* ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

It demands from us Reality—not make-believe.

“ *Except* your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

It demands from us Repentance for Sin.

“ *Except* ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

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In these five “excepts” we have it all—God’s offer to us, and the conditions attached to His offer.

Where can we get this Eternal Life? What are the channels which God has appointed? We read that He set up a Society on this earth. His words to His Apostles were :

“ I appoint unto you a kingdom.”

“ As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost ; whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

“ Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you ; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

Our Lord laid down the way by which we

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are to travel to heaven. The way is the great Society—His Church—the Family of God.

We will not venture to wander outside the family, to cut ourselves off from the Society. Though the Church may be very imperfect, though it may have many faults, it is the only appointed way, and therefore we dare not leave it. We often hear people say, " Oh, we Christians are all striving for the same end, what does it matter as to the way ? " How foolish it is to speak so ! God has in effect said, '*This* is the way, walk ye in it.' If we grasp this fact firmly, we shall be saved from many mistakes. We may dislike the priest, we may dislike the services, we may think that in many respects the Church falls short of her duty (and, of course, these matters are very important, and we must try to remedy them) ; *but*, in spite of these things, it is in the Church that God has said we can obtain Eternal Life ; it is in the Church that this Life is continued and strengthened ; it is in the Church that we may find guidance

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and help. God's grace is promised *through* His Church.

But you may say, "What about all those outside the Church, does not God give them His grace; do not their lives show that He does?" Of course He does. But they have taken hold of only part of the revelation of God. God the Holy Spirit makes the most of what they have; and often they so live up to and make use of that part of God's truth which they have grasped that we see what wonderful power there is even in really possessing a part only. Often their lives put to shame us members of God's Church who possess all the truth. For us who believe that God has appointed a definite way, there is only one thing to do—to keep to that way, and try to bring those who are outside into it. It does not require much imagination to realise what a tremendous power Christianity would be if there were just *one* united society. We do know that the want of unity among the professed followers of Christ is a great hindrance to the acceptance of the Gospel by heathen

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people. And not only to them, but to those around us as well. How can it be otherwise?

Again, we shall not be led away by what individual members of the Church may say. It sometimes happens that even the ministers of the Church deny important doctrines. This is very sad and disconcerting; but we must remember that the Truth will always be the Truth, that the Christian Faith consists of those things taught not by any part of the Church only, but by the whole Church, in all times, and as explained by the Great Councils of the undivided Church, guided, as our Lord promised, by His Holy Spirit. If we want to know what these truths are, all we have to do is to turn to the Creeds.

We shall not be led away by some popular preacher who preaches only part of the Faith. We shall not be deceived by the uprising and success of any particular movement. Of recent years a movement known as "The Brotherhood" has sprung into great prominence. The brotherhood of man is a glorious fact, and, so far as it goes, the Brotherhood

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Movement is an excellent thing. There is, however, a tendency to substitute the Brotherhood for the Society founded by Christ. What we members of Christ's Society should do is to realise, and make others realise, that the brotherhood of man is one of the great features of our Society, just because we are all brothers and sisters in God's Family—the Holy Catholic Church.

If, therefore, we once grasp the foundation facts of our religion, and possess a clear idea of what they mean, many of our difficulties will cease to exist. It is these foundation facts which matter ; on them rests everything else.

Chapter XII

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

THE great fact is the fact of Christ.

But what does that fact really mean to us? To *be* a Christian, what does *that* mean? What kind of life is ours? Wherein are we different from those who do not accept Christ?

If belief in Christ means anything at all, it certainly means that our whole lives will be lived in the light of the teaching, the character, the example of Christ. We shall instinctively submit everything to Him. "Does He approve of this?" "Does He condemn that?" "Will this particular action in any way be against Him?" "What does He want me to do?" These are the questions we shall put to ourselves.

And in this complete submission to Christ we shall be truly *free*, for we shall be free from all that prevents us fulfilling our destiny.

which consists of the perfect accord of our wills with the will of our Maker. In this freedom we shall find the inward peace—"the peace of God which passeth all understanding"—we shall experience the gladness, the joy, the exaltation of the first Christians. There are many to-day who do possess this joy and gladness; yet, speaking generally, we seem to have lost these characteristics of those first Christians and of the saints of later ages, such as St. Francis. Why is this? How is it that our religion seems somewhat different from theirs?

These first disciples had known our Lord. This must have exercised an extraordinary influence upon them. They had seen the Saviour, they had witnessed His mighty works, they had heard His gracious words, they had listened eagerly to His wonderful teachings; some of them had talked with Him. They had experienced His wondrous graciousness, His calmness, His majesty, His look, His voice. True, they had not realised at the time Who this great Prophet was; they had

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not understood that it was God Himself in human form Who was in their midst. But when this tremendous fact became known to them, can we be surprised that their lives were full of a wonderful uplifting joy? They had seen and heard the Maker of the Universe !

Listen to the Apostle St. John : “ That which was from the beginning, which *we have heard*, which *we have seen with our eyes*, which *we have looked upon*, and *our hands have handled*, of the Word of life ; . . . That which *we have seen and heard*, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us : and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, *that your joy may be full.*”

Others who had not actually seen the Lord would get the same exultant gladness from association with their more fortunate brethren. Moreover, they could see the power of the Holy Spirit visibly manifested before them : what further confirmation of the Gospel tidings was necessary ? God had visited His

people! Now they had sure knowledge of Him! His Spirit was actually dwelling in them! This great truth was constantly in their thoughts: "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?" I am afraid that we Christians now apprehend this indwelling presence of God only too feebly.

Possessing this sense of closeness to God, what did it matter to them if they were ill-treated and persecuted! Had not their Master, their Saviour, their God, suffered even unto death! Had He not actually told them to be exceeding glad at such treatment—great would be their reward in heaven! So we read that they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name. So it was that the martyrs went joyously to their death.

Intense personal devotion was one of the characteristics of these early followers of the Lord. Their hearts were full of love and gratitude for what He had done for them—"God commendeth His love toward us, in

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that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Christ upon the Cross ! In this deep mystery we see the price of our deliverance from sin ; here we see the measure of the awfulness of sin in the eyes of Almighty God. The more we grasp this, the greater will be our joy and gratitude for our Redemption from sin by the Atonement made by Christ—the making man " at one " with God. Then, again, had their Master not told them that He went to prepare a place for them, where He was they should be also ! Had He not called them His friends !

This sense of personal devotion is one, alas, which many of us feel we possess but faintly ! For the events that to the first Christians were so vivid, so real, to us appear to be far off and finished. Yet we have that which will make them full of a living reality. If we would only read the New Testament over and over again, we should find that Christ was indeed speaking to us, that little by little our characters were being moulded by Him, that our whole outlook on life was being made to

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conform to His Will, that instead of *saying* our prayers we were *praying* our prayers; nay, more, our hearts would constantly be thus speaking to our Heavenly Father. We should find ourselves judging our every action by *His* standard. We should go about our ordinary life doing everything from the one motive of serving our Master. It may be that our duty will be to do not those high things we should like to do, but things which we consider second and third best. The very fact, however, that they are God's Will for us lifts them at once into the highest place.

The real Christian life is one of joyful anticipation, for the real Christian looks on this life as but the beginning of a far more glorious life. He looks upon himself as a pilgrim journeying to his true home. He lives with his thoughts fixed on the World beyond, on the Life Eternal.

What is Christ's own definition of Eternal Life? "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent." To know

God. God is Love. And what is Love? Read that wonderful chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, and you will see that, as Professor Drummond says, St. Paul tells us that Love is made up of Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Humility, Courtesy, Unselfishness, Good Temper, Guilelessness, and Sincerity—the very qualities which all true men admire.

It has been said that “The greatest thing a man can do for his Heavenly Father is to be kind to some of His other children.” And so no man will be more alive in the things of this world than the Christian. His it is to show what a true man ought to be. He will be always upholding the right; striving to get rid of evils and abuses wherever he finds them; spending his life for his fellow men, often by just cheerfully doing the work before him to the best of his ability; sometimes making mistakes, sometimes failing, but never despairing, never giving up, manfully struggling on. He will enter into the joys and interests of others. He will love and make the most of

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all God's good gifts. The influence of such a life will make itself felt among his fellow men to an extent and in ways of which he little dreams.

We live in what is called a Christian country. Our ideals, our standard of conduct, our laws, have been built up with Christianity as their basis. And in accepting this standard we are in a sense followers of Christ. But this is something very different from the full meaning of a believer in Christ. It is strange that in the matter of religion men so often refuse to think logically or to press their reasoning to a logical conclusion. Of what does the religion of many of the men in this country consist? They are strong believers in God, they admire what they know of our Lord's character; some believe in the miracles recorded, others do not; others have an idea that it *may* be all true. But as to worship, help from God through the Sacraments—in fact, any definite religion—for these they have little or no use. Men who will tell you that they believe in our Lord will not trouble to find out what He wants them

to do, or to carry out His plain commands. Others will be quite ready to admit that our Lord did set up a society on this earth, but they will take no steps to become active members of it. Then, the fact that there are so many bodies of men calling themselves Christians, yet speaking with differing voices, causes many to stand aloof altogether. There are also those who feel that to be a follower of Christ demands from them a life which they think it impossible to live, and, rather than be hypocrites, they make no open profession of Him.

Thus we have before our eyes the strange spectacle of a great number of men possessing more or less an upright character and high ideals, yet who cannot be called Christians in the real sense of the word. It is, however, very necessary to remember that most of them as children have received some sort of Christian teaching and training, and that it is the Christian influence of the past and present which has produced in them this character. But how much they are missing !

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If men would only look " the fact of Christ " steadily in the face ! But modern life is so full, so complex, so breathless in incident and attractions, that though we hear His appeal we fail to respond. Yet the appeal of Christ meets the needs of every human being. As one writer puts it : " The Gospel with its story of Jesus, and the Church as the family of His love, do but carry to its highest all that world of uplifting joy revealed to us through human love and society." ¹ One of our foremost philosophers, when speaking of the " religion of humanity "—an impossible kind of religion, which leaves God and a future life out altogether, which asks men to take " humanity " as their God, and work and live for that—asks, " What has it to say to the more obscure multitude who are absorbed and well-nigh overwhelmed in the constant struggle with daily needs and narrow cares ; who have but little leisure or inclination to consider the precise rôle they are called on to play in the

¹ Figgis, *The Gospel and Human Needs*, p. 77.

great drama of 'humanity,' and who might, in any case, be puzzled to discover its interest or its importance? Can it assure them that there is no human being so insignificant as not to be of infinite worth in the eyes of Him Who created the heavens, or so feeble but that his action may have consequence of infinite moment long after this material system shall have crumbled into nothingness? Does it offer consolation to those who are in grief, hope to those who are bereaved, strength to the weak, forgiveness to the sinful, rest to those who are weary and heavy laden? If not, then, whatever be its merits, it is no rival to Christianity. It cannot penetrate and vivify the inmost life of ordinary humanity. There is in it no nourishment for ordinary human souls, no comfort for ordinary human sorrow, no help for ordinary human weakness." ¹

And in another passage this same writer says, "What is needed is such a living faith

¹ W. M. Short, *Arthur James Balfour as Philosopher and Thinker*, p. 405.

in God's relation to Man as shall leave no place for that helpless resentment against the appointed Order, so apt to rise within us at the sight of undeserved pain. And this faith is possessed by those who vividly realise the Christian form of Theism. For they worship One Who is no remote contriver of a universe, to whose ills He is indifferent. If they suffer, did He not on their account suffer also? If suffering falls not always on the most guilty, was He not innocent? Shall they cry aloud that the world is ill-designed for their convenience, when He for their sakes subjected Himself to its conditions? It is true that beliefs like these do not in any narrow sense resolve our doubts, nor provide us with explanations. But they give us something better than many explanations."¹

"Besides our four Gospels," says another writer, "there is a fifth, which has been eighteen centuries in writing—that is, the work of Christ among mankind. . . . No revolu-

¹ W. M. Short, *Arthur James Balfour as Philosopher and Thinker*, p. 499.

tion in the history of the world can be compared with that which placed the Cross as the boundary between two entirely different ages, and which caused to flow forth from the rock of Calvary a river of life. . . . At the basis of our modern civilisation lies the thought of Jesus." ¹

Jesus Christ. The question He Himself asked must be answered by us : " Whom say ye that I the Son of man am ? " As on the disciples of old, by the shore of the Galilean lake, the Master looked with eyes full of yearning and love, so to-day He looks at us ; as to them of old, so to-day He says to us, " Follow Me." What is our answer going to be ? Are we going to accept service under His banner ? Are we going to do our utmost to spread His Kingdom ? Are we going to take up our cross and follow Him ? Surely there can be but one answer. Surely we shall cry with Simon Peter, " Lord to Whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life,

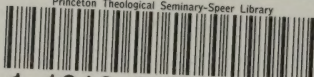
¹ E. de Pressensé, *Jesus Christ : His Times, Life, and Work*, p. 506.

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and we believe, and are sure, that Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God."

Surely we shall cry with St. Paul, " Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ? "

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